The Achievement of Flannery O'Connor: Her System of Thought, Her Fictional Techniques, and an Explication of Her Thought and Techniques in the Violent Bear It Away

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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR: HER SYSTEM OF THOUGHT, HER FICTIONAL TECHNIQUES, AND AN EXPLICATION OF HER THOUGHT AND TECHNIQUES IN THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY

by

Donald Racky, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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LIFE

Donald Joseph Racky, Jr., was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 21, 1937.

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From 1962 to 1966, Mr. Racky was a member of the governing Executive
Council of the Chicago Archdiocesan Association of Teachers of English, a local affiliate of the NCTE. For two years he was a member of the group's seven-man planning committee.

Mr. Racky taught one section of freshman English for two semesters at Loyola University Evening School during 1966.

Mr. Racky is the author of forty-nine Book Review Tests published commercially by the Perfection Form Company, Logan, Iowa. He has also published a fifty-page study-guide to James Fennimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, with the same company.
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INTRODUCTION

A recent survey of more than one hundred of the most important authors and critics in the country listed Flannery O'Connor ninth among the "most artful, most truthful, most memorable" and most enduring authors of the post-war generation from 1945 to 1965. Opinions were solicited and obtained from such authorities as Walter Allen, Wayne Booth, Malcolm Cowley, Frederick Dupee, Leon Edel, Maxwell Geismar, John Hawkes, Joseph Heller, Gilbert Highet, John Knowles, Andrew Lytle, Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Katherine Ann Porter, Anthony Powell, Susan Sontag, Harvey Swados, Allen Tate, John Updike, Gore Vidal, and Wallace Stegner. This survey ranks her with Hemingway, Faulkner, Bellow, Salinger, Warren, Porter, and others.¹ In the fifty-year history of the O. Henry Awards, only six authors have obtained the First Place Prize more than once: Benet, Steele, Kay Boyle, Welty, Faulkner - and Flannery O'Connor.² Certainly the literary "establishment" has recognized her stature: Esquire Magazine, in a 1963 "unprecedented" survey of "what

¹Book Week in Chicago Sunday Sun-Times, September 26, 1965.
²These statistics can be obtained by observing the First Place Prize Stories in each year's volume of Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards (New York: Doubleday and Company).
every American writer of importance is working on" in this possible "vintage literary year" of literary boom,"\(^3\) singled out seven authors as being of such primary importance that they merited special treatment. The seven were John Cheever, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Penn Warren, James Jones, William Styron, Edward Albee, Saul Bellow - and Flannery O'Connor.\(^4\) Miss O'Connor's last two books were among the approximately six finalists for the National Book Award, although neither actually won. *Time* cited *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Flannery O'Connor's latest book, as one of only three works of fiction worth serious attention in 1965.\(^5\) The country's foremost literary critics attest to the quality of her work with increasing admiration. Paul Engle remarked that she "goes on being one of our finest writers."\(^6\) Granville Hicks noted that even a few months after her death "already a kind of Flannery O'Connor legend is taking shape."\(^7\) A year later Hicks again devoted an article to Flannery O'Connor and noted that her reputation had steadily grown

\(^3\)Esquire, LX (July, 1963), 50

\(^4\)Ibid., 50-62.

\(^5\)"Time Essay: The Year's Best or There is Room at the Top," *Time*, LXXVI (December 31, 1965), 16.


\(^7\)Granville Hicks, "Cold, Hard Look at Humankind," *Saturday Review* (May 29, 1965), 23.
and would continue to grow. Walter Allen feels that while in life she may have been familiar mainly to those who kept abreast of the most advanced "artistic" writing, in death Flannery O'Connor will have a reputation growing in the manner of Nathanael West's. Robert Drake is not sounding a pessimistic note when he feels that "finally, it is with...major-minor figures in our literature that Miss O'Connor will be ranked" because he means that in technique, in cacophonic style, and in intense theme - as well as in literary stature - she will "remind one of Donne or Hopkins." Allen Tate judges her a writer who made good use of an unusual background and an "inexplicable genius...whose like probably will not appear again in the United States." At the time of her death, Newsweek, surveying her brief career, found Flannery O'Connor to be a master who produced more than merely stories that "will certainly become a permanent part of American literature" - but also "some of the finest stories in the language." Such an array of respected judgements indicates that Flannery O'Connor is a writer worthy of close attention and study.


Miss O'Connor, as Hicks noted, has been receiving wide attention. Few attempts have been made, however, to make a close study of her writing. More than two hundred articles survey her general aims and achievements or make some general statements about one or another of her particular writings. Although this criticism is itself far from insignificant for a writer who produced only four books and who died so recently and so young, it leaves much room for careful, systematic, intensive analysis of what Flannery O'Connor was writing. Some critics have begun that process of careful analysis which must attend the passing of any important writer. Only a few, however, have approached the area which is the main topic of the present study - a systematic analysis of Flannery O'Connor's directly expository statements of her philosophy of life and art. Further, the major motifs and organic unity of The Violent Bear It Away has seldom received explication as detailed as that in the present study, even though the explication given here is intended primarily as an application of Flannery O'Connor's theory revealed in her directly expository statements.

Barnabas Davis\textsuperscript{13} examines Flannery O'Connor's stories for their relationship to orthodox Catholic theology. The present study will use the less subjective base of Flannery O'Connor's expository statements. It will also range far beyond Flannery O'Connor's theology; it will systematically examine

\textsuperscript{13}Barnabas Davis, "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Belief in Recent Fiction," \textit{Listening}, 0 / sic/ (Autumn, 1965), 5-21.
the whole fabric of her outlook on life and on art. In his introduction to the
posthumous *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Miss O'Connor's literary
executor, Robert Fitzgerald, identifies three or four major concerns that
recur in Flannery O'Connor's stories, and he compares her with several other
modern literary figures. He does not attempt any systematic or complete
study. He merely indicates a few major areas of concern which any reader of
Flannery O'Connor should observe if he wishes more than basic appreciation.
Robert Drake's study *Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay* and Stanley Edgar
Hyman's *Flannery O'Connor* each spend about eight pages mentioning, like
Fitzgerald, some of the more salient features of Flannery O'Connor's thoughts
on life and on writing. They both do more than Fitzgerald in that they examine
Flannery O'Connor's expository writing in order to locate the "first principle"
that is most basic to all Flannery O'Connor's thoughts and stories. Both
authors use only one or two of the many expository statements, however;
neither attempts a full treatment, and neither tries to show how one or another
of Flannery O'Connor's ideas flow systematically from each other. Both
authors are intent on making a rapid survey of the achievements of Flannery

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14 Robert Fitzgerald, "Introduction," Flannery O'Connor's *Everything That
Rises Must Converge* by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus and
Giroux, 1965) vii-xxxiv.

Hyman, *Flannery O'Connor*, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American
Writers, No. 54, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).
O'Connor. There is considerable need, therefore, for such a study as the present one—a systematic analysis of all the available expository statements Flannery O'Connor made about her theories of life and art.

Flannery O'Connor's stories have not fared much better than her expository writings. True, considerably more has been written about the stories, and some critics have begun some close explications. Yet no good estimate of what Flannery O'Connor was doing has been safely obtained from the stories alone. Granville Hicks rightly notes that though Flannery O'Connor's reputation is soaring, there is so far "no agreement as to what she was trying to say or do."

In a recent appraisal of all modern Southern writers, Meeker must soften his judgements when he discusses Flannery O'Connor because he finds that she is "one of the most controversial Southern writers" and that she has baffled many readers, as she had baffled her Georgia neighbors, with her apparently "senseless absurdities." Less bombastically, Cheney reports, with the approval of the Sewanee Review, that this work of the "fiction writer...most significant in our time" has obtained "as yet but limited understanding." Again, a thorough and systematic study of what Flannery


O'Connor said she was trying to do should further an understanding of this complex author's writing.

The mere lack of such an analysis for an author of note is not, however, the only reason why such a study is necessary. Even the few brief studies that do exist, for example, must face a puzzling characteristic of Flannery O'Connor herself: her expository statement often seem contradictory. For example, Flannery O'Connor commented that she did not "know what a symbol was until I started reading about them. It seemed I was going to have to know about them if I was going to be a respectable literary person." 19 On another occasion, however, Miss O'Connor complained that a modern audience is not subtle enough to look for the four medieval levels of symbolic meaning.20 - quite a stiff demand in a complicated area of literary knowledge, especially when that demand is made by an author who had disclaimed experience with such subtleties. Again, Flannery O'Connor claims: "I wouldn't know about literary questions. . . . So-called experimental fiction always bores me. If it looks peculiar I don't read it." 21 Yet on another occasion she asserted: "If I were asked what we can actually demand of the . . . novelist in these times,


I should say only the unexpected" - not that "brand of social realism that no serious novelist has been interested in for twenty years."²² Both these statements are probably due to Flannery O'Connor's strong feat of excessive use of reason alone and her existential desire to evaluate a whole experience. Not wanting to sound like a mere ivory-tower theorist, Flannery O'Connor would at time debunk discussions that seemed excessively abstract. Whatever the cause for such apparent contradictions, however, one cannot deny that they make her expository statements impossible to accept at face value and in isolation from the full range of her thought. A full and systematic consideration of her expository thought must replace the citing of one or two sentences from only one or two of her essays - the practice of the above-mentioned existing short introductions to Flannery O'Connor's thought.

Examples of these apparent contradictions abound in Flannery O'Connor's exposition. Miss O'Connor's statement that manners "had to be pretty stable before they make novels, that is to say, good novels,"²³ seems directly opposed to another of her statements that "because we are losing our customary manners we're probably overly conscious of them; this seems to be a


a condition that produces writers." Again she can frequently give the appearance of not worrying about anything but abstract right and wrong, especially not about an audience; yet she can also say that only a writer who has "lost his mind" will not worry about "communication" as a primary goal. Very often such apparent contradictions stem from words used in several different senses - another problem that makes random citation of Miss O'Connor's thoughts difficult. Precise definition can solve many difficulties, but precise definition is dependent upon systematic and close analysis. Sometimes the paradoxes in Flannery O'Connor's exposition seem to stem from development in her thought, so that at a later date her mind is different from what it was earlier. Thus, at an early lecture, Flannery O'Connor agreed with Walker Percy that the present "generation of Southerners had no more interest in the Civil War than in the Boer War. I think that is probably quite true." A year later she cites a more recent speech of the same Walker Percy that "there were so many good Southern writers. . . 'because we lost the War.' " Or again, when a question at an early speech


asks why Flannery O'Connor had called the South "Christ-haunted instead of Christ-centered," Miss O'Connor replied: "I shouldn't have said that, should I? . . . It is hard to explain a flat statement like that. I think it is a subject that a book could be written about but it would take me ten or twelve years to do it." 28 She explicitly says that she is just feeling her way towards an understanding of this concept. She certainly did not abandon the concept, because a year later, at another lecture, she firmly asserted that the South "is most certainly Christ-haunted." 29 Whatever the reasons, Flannery O'Connor's expository statements about life and literature are certainly confusing and paradoxical enough that it is naive to hope to prove very much about her views by merely citing several sentences. Such citations are bound to have the distortion of statements out of context because for Flannery O'Connor, ideas have for their context the whole framework of everything she wrote. A full and systematic study of her statements of theory is needed.

Other considerations of the nature of Flannery O'Connor's statements also urge the value of such a study.

Knowing what a person was trying to do is important in any effort to understand the achievement of that person. Knowing an author's basic attitude towards life, knowing that author's critical philosophy, and knowing the author's view on writing techniques are important in an effort to understand

what the author has written. There is value in the old critical dictum: Know what the author is trying to do and then judge whether he accomplished what he claimed to be doing.

Flannery O'Connor left a large body of formal and informal statements about what she was trying to do in her stories. Formal essays indicating her aims as a writer are the following: "The Fiction Writer and His Country," "The Church and the Fiction Writer," "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," "The Regional Writer," "Fiction is a Subject with a History - It Should Be Taught that way," and "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Recent Southern Fiction." 30 The Introduction to a Memoir of Mary Ann, which was printed in Jubilee magazine as "Mary Ann: An Excerpt from A Memoir of Mary Ann," and her brief review of Chardin's The Phenomenon of Man reveal Flannery O'Connor's own writing standards indirectly by showing what she thought of the writings of others. 31 Occasionally Flannery O'Connor published less


formal, short statements of only several paragraphs explaining one or two specific aspects of her critical theory. These include the following: a contribution to Herbert Gold's *Fiction of the Fifties*, "Flannery O'Connor," "The Novelist and Free Will," "Recent Southern Fiction: A Panel Discussion," and the Introduction to the revised edition of *Wise Blood*. Her critical theory was also revealed in the following published interviews: "In and Out of Books" by Harvey Breit, "She Writes Powerful Fiction" by Robert Donner, "A Writer at Home with Her Heritage" by Granville Hicks, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview" by C. Ross Mullins, "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor" by Gerard E. Sherry, and "Off the Cuff" by Joel Wells. More information on Flannery O'Connor's character, general views, and statements is found in such personal remembrances of Miss O'Connor's life and utterance as the following: "Introduction" to *Everything that Rises Must Converge* by Robert Fitzgerald, "Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," "Flannery O'Connor:


'Literary Witch' by Margaret Meaders, "Gracious Greatness" by Katherine Anne Porter, "Resurrection in August" by Sr. Maura, "Flannery O'Connor: A Scrutiny of Two Forms of Her Many-Leveled Art" by Richard Coleman, "The Ecumenic Core in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor" and "Flannery O'Connor - A Tribute" by Sr. Mariella Gable, "Flannery O'Connor: A Remembrance and Some Letters" by Richard Stern, various references in the 1964 memorial edition of Esprit Magazine, and of course brief citations by others who write about Flannery O'Connor and happened to have brief contact with her at some time.

Stanley Edgar Hyman in Flannery O'Connor, Fitzgerald, Dowell, and Sr. Maura all cite speeches or informal university discussions which Miss O'Connor conducted while they were present or for which they were able to obtain manuscripts or tape recordings. Lewis A. Lawson in The Added Dimension collects a few other almost accessible comments made by Flannery


35 Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, 40-41, 44.
O'Connorto two or three small-town or college newspapers. Thus Miss O'Connor's explicit statements about her writings are found in documents ranging from prepared essays to brief fragmentary conversations jotted down by a friend. Several very brief statements by characters who are authors in two of Miss O'Connor's stories - Asbury in "The Enduring Chill" and Calhoun in "The Partridge Festival" - provide some dubious information on critical theory and practice. Both the stories and comments in the personal remembrances must be used with caution, obviously, because the investigator must decide whether or not these characters are speaking from Flannery O'Connor's point of view.

36 Lewis A. Lawson, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 226-263. In these pages Mr. Lawson gives a few excerpts from Miss O'Connor's expository writing. His excerpts are very brief, usually only a paragraph long, and most of the quotations are taken from two or three of Miss O'Connor's best known writings. However, he does briefly quote a few of the relatively inaccessible writings.


38 The most troublesome issue here is whether Flannery O'Connor's views are represented by the characters in the two stories. The critic must presume on the general reliability of the human witness in the personal remembrances. In any event, the problem is not very great because Flannery O'Connor was not the kind of writer who was forever making herself the protagonist of her stories. Writers seldom appear as characters in her stories, and, even in these two stories in which they are characters, the total output of critical discussion they indulge in does not cover very many words.
Some indirect but rather reliable knowledge of Flannery O'Connor's own views about her writing practices can be obtained from the articles of two critics, McGowan and Gable.³⁹ Ordinarily the investigator would reject such items as secondary sources, but these two critical articles have the unusual distinction of having been quite forcefully endorsed by Miss O'Connor as representing her own views. When asked about the critical reception of The Violent Bear It Away, Flannery O'Connor replied: "There were enough... reviews which shared my own interpretation of it for me to feel that I succeeded well enough in doing what I intended to do." Miss O'Connor then mentioned one review in particular: "It was written by a Jesuit scholastic, Robert McCown, whom I had never met or corresponded with beforehand. But he seemed to understand everything I did about the book."⁴⁰ Of Sr. Gable's article, Flannery O'Connor replied, in Sr. Gable's words, that it "came nearer the truth about her writing than any other criticism. With characteristics humility she Flannery O'Connor said: 'I shall learn from it myself and save my breath by referring other people to it.'"⁴¹ Thus these two


critical articles can be taken as presenting Miss O'Connor's own views about life and about her writing, even though they might not be viewed as perhaps quite so authoritative as essays which Miss O'Connor initiated entirely by herself.

Some insights into Flannery O'Connor's mind can also be obtained from her article "Living with a Peacock," which curiously also helps to explain her perspective on life and literature. Finally, some of Flannery O'Connor's many letters to friends and inquirers - often other creative writers or critics and therefore often concerned specifically with literary matters - add to her posit of critical theory or explain in greater depth the meaning of her previous critical statements and the meaning of a few characters or incidents in some of her stories. Those whose correspondence with Flannery O'Connor has already been published are the following: Sr. Alice, Sessions, Elizabeth Bishop, Sr. Gable, Stern, literary executor Robert Fitzgerald, explicator Lawrence Perrine, author John Hawkes, Farnham, critic Inhab Hassan.


Rupp, and Lewis Lawson. Sometimes these letters do not relate to literary matters, yet still shed light on the workings of Flannery O'Connor's mind. Sometimes these people have published only a sentence or two or a paragraph from one or two letters Flannery O'Connor sent them; sometimes a whole letter or a whole series of letters has been published. In several instances long letters which quite specifically concern literary matters provide invaluable statements about Miss O'Connor's theories. In any event, these letters with direct statements from Miss O'Connor cannot be ignored; a few of the longer more specific ones are as valuable as Flannery O'Connor's formal essays.

Thus, much expository material presents Flannery O'Connor's views and gives the critic good insight into what Flannery O'Connor was trying to do.

There are two problems here, however. At least half of this material has been

published in magazines not easily available. For example, *Fresco, Esprit, Grevirier*, and *The Phoenix* Magazines - small college literary journals which usually publish students' creative writing - are not only unavailable in most libraries, but also unknown to most researchers. The material is scattered over more than twenty five books and magazines - a challenging variety of sources for any investigator who would wish for a complete statement of Flannery O'Connor's views. Although Friedman and Lawson gather some of this material in their recent book *The Added Dimension*, they do not gather all the material, and even what they do print is presented merely as excerpted paragraphs, out of context, too brief and unorganized to be valuable to a person wishing to understand Miss O'Connor's total frame of mind. 45

Furthermore, this material is quite uneven in tone. Some of it obviously was intended for formal publication and was carefully polished by Flannery O'Connor. Some was the result of talks Miss O'Connor gave at colleges or to literary groups, and is therefore a bit more relaxed in keeping with its original oral delivery. The interviews of course are still more formal and conversational, while the personal letters often have Miss

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O'Connor using slang, personal references, etc. The articles by McCowan and Gable are of a different texture entirely because, while they enjoy Flannery O'Connor's full enthusiastic endorsement, they are not in her own words and they were not occasioned by her own thinking. They are thus a primary authority but not quite of the eminence of primary texts. Moreover, Flannery O'Connor produced most of this material in answer to some particular question or problem - the topic suggested by the group for whom she was to speak, a question asked in a letter, a previous event in her relationship with the person or persons with whom she was communicating. There is, for example, considerably more material in which Flannery O'Connor deals with her attitude toward the South, the church and the grotesque than there is about symbolism or irony - because these former are the areas in which most inquirers and critics were most interested and about which they asked the most questions. Because of the shifting tones of this material, therefore, and because of the random way in which the topics are treated, there is need for a compilation of Flannery O'Connor's basic premises, need for an explanation of how her ideas and techniques systematically proceed from these premises and avow a consistent organized view of life and of art.

Because of the inaccessibility of four of these magazines containing this primary material, therefore, because of the wide distribution of the material, and because of the random ad hoc nature and uneven texture of the remarks, no thorough and systematic study of Flannery O'Connor's critical
theory has been made. "If collected and analyzed, these critical comments would help to clarify Miss O'Connor's fictional passages, which have seemed so extravagant to some.\(^46\) One of the main purposes of this dissertation is to make this gathering and systematic analysis. As often as possible, Flannery O'Connor's own words will be used in an attempt to weave all her critical writings into a whole.

A number of reasons, therefore, urge the value of a thorough and close systematic analysis of Miss O'Connor's expository statements of her ideas on life and on literature. Such a study is worth while for any good author and necessary for an author of Flannery O'Connor's status. Confusion about what Flannery O'Connor was trying to say and do in her stories, apparent contradictions and developments within her theories, the scattered nature of her expository statements, and the shifting tones or levels of precision from one statement to another - all these factors make such an analysis desirable and demanding. It is the purpose of the present study to make such an analysis. This dissertation will bring Miss O'Connor's theories into one place and systematize them into one organized body. By reviewing what Flannery O'Connor thought she was doing, this summary of theory will establish a-priori the likely meanings and techniques of her stories; it will therefore

aid future analysis of these stories.

Several other minor difficulties should be mentioned here, since they have a bearing on the method of procedures in this study.

Even in her expository writings, Flannery O'Connor did not write with the precision of a scientist or a philosopher. Her very philosophy itself, with its insistence on the whole man and its abhorrence of excessive rationalism, would have caused her to write thus even if she were a professional philosopher. But she was not writing as a philosopher. Even in her expository writings, Flannery O'Connor wrote as a literary artist. Metaphors, ironies, contrasts, and subtleties abound. Thus, as this study begins to systematize her thoughts, it must constantly repeat and re-echo other statements Flannery O'Connor made. The only effective way to understand a writer whose meanings are gently shaded by the subtleties of indirect or figurative language is to examine his use of a word or an idea each time it appears - explicating carefully and repeating frequently. Flannery O'Connor's ideas can be understood systematically and precisely only if one patiently compares numerous passages where she uses similar words and ideas. One can then see the shades of meanings which the words attract from each context and from the series of contexts; only then can a definite statement be made about exact meanings. Thus, this study will proceed as explication of Miss O'Connor's expository material. Interspersed with critical interpretation will be many
juxtaposed interpretations from various of Flannery O'Connor's expository writings. In a sense, then, this is a specifically literary study and not merely a study of a literary figure. Since Flannery O'Connor's expository writings exhibit the same poetic compactness and density as her stories, even the study of her expository writings must weigh such factors as nuances of wording, irony, contrasts, selectivity, and figures of speech. In any event, the technique of careful word-by-word explication is what is required as the procedure of this study. As a person whose principal message was that life was a thing of texture rather than of over-simplification and systematization, Flannery O'Connor would probably find it fitting that a study that treats even her expository writing should consider a fabric of interwoven complex texture rather than a scientific delineation.

Another minor difficulty is that Flannery O'Connor is primarily a religious writer. There is danger that any study of such a writer can become lost in theological speculation. Flannery O'Connor herself recognized the difference between theology and philosophy; her reasonings are usually supported by arguments from both fields. As a person aware of the need for communication with a secular culture, moreover, Miss O'Connor more usually dwelt with philosophical arguments for her theories about life and literature. Every attempt is made in this study to differentiate between Flannery
O'Connor's theological arguments and her philosophical arguments, and every attempt is made to follow Miss O'Connor's own example in putting far greater stress on the philosophical arguments. Since Miss O'Connor was not so much worried about philosophy as about how ideas were related to literature, the task is somewhat easier: one can focus on her theories of writing as a primary procedure. Since Flannery O'Connor's vocabulary often used words with special theological or Biblical connotations - because she could thereby make both the philosophical and theological points symbolically at one time and with one statement - the task at times becomes confusing. An example can probably best make clear what must be done in this study: just as studies of Hawthorne and Dostoevsky - the two writers whom Flannery O'Connor most admired and imitated - must take into account the strong theological implications of the writings of these two authors, so must any study of Flannery O'Connor. The theology and the philosophy are often closely interwined. But just as critics have no fear that the theology of Hawthorne and Dostovesky will cause criticism to turn into theology, so must critics of Flannery O'Connor treat her ideas without worrying lest "too much" theology appear. Actually, the fact that the theology and the philosophy are so intertwined gives one more strong reason why such a careful study of Flannery

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47 These theological arguments have validity only for those who share Flannery O'Connor's theological commitments - a kind of liberal Catholicism which not even all Catholics would accept.
O'Connor - or Hawthorne or Dostovesky - is necessary: one must distinguish between what is useful as an insight into the author's own private personal views, and what is valid as insight for everyone. The present study, therefore, without ignoring Flannery O'Connor's theology, will emphasize, as did Miss O'Connor herself, her philosophy of life and of literature. Hyman quite rightly notes that "any discussion of her theology can only be preliminary to, not a substitute for, aesthetic analysis and evaluation." 48

Finally, a lengthy examination of abstract statements of theory is in danger, as Flannery O'Connor herself would say, "floating off"; it must be kept "anchored to the earth." 49 Thus, after the main portion of this study has examined Miss O'Connor's statements of theory, a smaller final portion will examine how this theory is applied in her narrative practice. Such application of theory has been limited to one work, The Violent Bear it Away for several reasons. Any attempt to apply theory to all of Miss O'Connor's stories, it was felt, would result in either a few hasty generalizations that merely echo other general introductions to the stories, 50 or would distort the purpose of this study by making it an extremely lengthy detailed explication rather than

48 Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, 44.


50 There are at present two studies which attempt to survey Flannery O'Connor's achievements. They are the following: Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans, 1966); Stanley Edgar Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 54 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).
a study of Miss O'Connor's theories about life and literature. A close application of theory to one of Miss O'Connor's books, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for one to use the present study to shed valuable light on the meaning of that book and does not merely add to the already large number of generalities about Flannery O'Connor or about that book. The Violent Bear It Away presents itself as the best book for such an application of theory because it is Miss O'Connor's longest unified work.

The Violent Bear It Away is a good book for this application of theory, moreover, because it is also Flannery O'Connor's most controversial book. If one of the main purposes of this study is to resolve controversies about the meaning of her stories, its most valuable application could be a somewhat better explanation of The Violent Bear It Away. Thus this dissertation has a double purpose. Its primary purpose is the already explained study of Miss O'Connor's theories. Its secondary purpose is to provide an explication of the major confusing issues in The Violent Bear It Away as Flannery O'Connor's theories of life and art are revealed in that novel.

Controversies about The Violent Bear It Away can be summarized as follows. Coffey complains that The Violent Bear It Away errs in a way in which Flannery O'Connor's short stories never err: "The vehicle plainly does not fit the tenor." The novel is based on the metaphor that Tarwater has inherited the urge to baptize and baptism is a metaphor for religious conversion.
The trouble is that the novel is all metaphor and no reality. One cannot "literally" say that people go around "dousing" others or that one can inherit this tendency. For the novel to be valid, Coffey requires a literal level of plot to be true and the metaphoric or deeper-levels to be simultaneously true. Coffey feels that the novel was too long a form for Flannery O'Connor to manage, that it was so long that Miss O'Connor lost the thread of literal meaning. Such criticism probably reflects what many critics find wrong with the novel: when critics complain that the novel has an exaggerated brutality, that it is nothing but grotesque exaggerations, they are echoing Coffey's charge that the religious metaphoric level lacks grounding in reality. The book excessively exaggerates brutality in order to stress metaphorically religious vehemence. Time sums up this general view and criticizes Flannery O'Connor's stories when it complains that all too often does "Ferocious Flannery weaken her wallop by groping about for a symbolic second-story meaning," often "something about salvation." This "fumbling" is what mars the work whenever Flannery O'Connor attempts "the longer form" of the novel. Time also feels that Miss O'Connor so exaggerated reality to allow metaphoric and symbolic implications in her stories that "though her handling of God-drunk backwoodsmen is based in religious seriousness, it

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seldom seems to rise above an ironic jape." The Violent Bear It Away is a meaningless novel because it lacks the "flashes of pity that alone could make such a story bearable." Thus the book ends up being a mere horror story of faith in which "characters are for or against God with a kind of vindictiveness that . . . must make even Him uneasy." The last few pages of the book showing Tarwater's supposed conversion, therefore, are meaningless also - an adjunct artificially attached to a pessimistic book.

An important critic of Southern literature joins Coffey in a deeper examination of why Flannery O'Connor's stories are unsatisfactory. Louis D. Rubin argues: "Like many others, I feel that it was a short story writer that Flannery O'Connor was at her best. Much though I admire elements of Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, neither of these longer works quite comes off. Perhaps it is because she is so very intense a writer that only her short stories can bear the weight of that concentration of form and meaning she brought to the craft of fiction." T. Gosset agrees that Flannery O'Connor's insight is too "explosive for more than a short story. Such surging vigor of religious belief must be disciplined by the confines of the short story or it

52 God-Intoxicated Hillbillies," *Time*, LXXV (February 29, 1960), 118, 121.

"comes through as mere bigotry." 54 It suggests otherwise "the secure believer poking bitter fun at the confused and bedeviled." 55

Even some who praise Flannery O'Connor find major weaknesses especially in *The Violent Bear It Away*. Harman echoes Coffey's complaint that Flannery O'Connor's metaphor is so exaggerated that the reader cannot establish enough sympathy with some character to pierce the metaphor and come to reality. Hartman complains that her novels lack a "comforting communion" between book and author, that a book by Flannery O'Connor "often gives the impression that it is about to bite somebody." 56 Granville Hicks, who had earlier spoken of the compassion in Miss O'Connor's short stories, makes his final judgement that, while she is not a pessimist, there is no one blacker. 57 Pickrel finds *The Violent Beat It Away* not too explosive or too confusing but a little "too schematic," 58 while Murray delights that Flannery O'Connor does not make things all black or all white. 59 The critics here give evidence that either the

55 "God-Intoxicated Hillbillies," *Time* LXXV (February 29, 1960), 121.
novel is confusing or the critics at least are confused - because experts directly contradict each other's opinions. Rosenberger agrees that the novel is "a fairly explicit parable of the twentieth century." While his companion reviewer in New York, Prescott, summarizes his position as follows:

"A novelist with Christian concern," Miss O'Connor calls herself, "who writes about what she sees in relation to the Redemption of Christ." In Miss O'Connor's new novel, "The Violent Bear It Away," that relationship is presumably pleasant; but if it is, it is not apparent to me, nor do I think that it will be to many others. But they /her virtues as a writer/ are insufficient to atone for a grotesque and bizarre central situation that never seems real. One can pity Miss O'Connor's doomed characters as caricatured types of human misery; but one can't believe in them, or care about them.

Probably the best summary of the case against Flannery O'Connor comes from Hubert Creekmore. He finds that The Violent Bear It Away lacks form. The novel preaches its thesis exclusively and is so "schematic" that the characters are not interesting at all. Probability is lacking - because Flannery O'Connor's rigid thesis demands too great reliance on chance in such incidents as Old Tarwater's shallow ravings and Tarwater's hitch-hiking and excessive "pyromania." Moreover, though Flannery O'Connor is trying to preach, she has created a negative book that has no positive norm; no one character accepts Christianity or present whatever Flannery O'Connor does hold to be orthodox or

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proper values. Too much is warped and grotesque. More importantly, the book is a disunified jumble of "gratuitous scenes"; it is a short story stuffed with extra digressions, flashbacks, mutterings, and useless detail. The plot does not advance; the characters do not change or develop. Nothing is present to broaden the substance of the novel and make it the organic masterpiece that a few Catholic critics claim.

Thus the case against The Violent Bear It Away eventually comes down to the fact that the novel is very confusing with its sharp tone and grimly unavoidable climax, and with its weaving of detail that seems to be not only unnecessarily grotesque, but also simply unnecessary "stuffing" that dilates what should have been a controlled short story, especially with the violent emotional vehemence it portrays.

Many critics, however, find The Violent Bear It Away to be a good novel. Despite his own confusion, Hicks feels that it is a "first-rate" novel that proves Flannery O'Connor's importance. 63 Hood contradicts the pessimist by claiming that the novel has a fine texture that illustrates one of the greatest virtues of good prose, the ever-expanding symbols that deepen the surface of a novel and make it a rich masterpiece - exactly opposite to Creekmore's conten-

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63 Hicks, "Southern Gothic with a Vengeance," 18
tion that the novel was too shallow. Others find the novel "close to a classic," the hinge of Flannery O'Connor's reputation, and the book that turned critical doubters into passionate believers that Flannery O'Connor is a "master" producing "some of the finest stories in the language." J. Greene feels that The Violent Bear It Away is much better than Flannery O'Connor's short stories because she has more room in the novel. He feels that the intensity of Flannery O'Connor's usual theme does not require the discipline of the short story; he finds that her intensity requires the novel form, so that the emotion is not caught in an "intense hothouse," and so that the complexity of her lines of thought can be revealed. Hyman, in his recent survey, indicates the range of critical dispute when he notes that "despite the prevailing opinion, she was primarily a novelist, not a short story writer, and consequently her novels are better and more important than even the best of her stories." He feels that The Violent Bear It Away is Flannery O'Connor's "masterpiece," that it is "perfectly shaped" with "no loose ends" or details that do not advance the swelling crescendo of meaning.


66 Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, 43-44, 19, 23.
Probably the basic problem in all this critical confusion as has already
been indicated is the ending of *The Violent Bear It Away*. There is considerable
confusion about just what is happening at the ending. B. Davis feels that
Tarwater despairs. 67 Bowen feels that Tarwater rejects prophetism, but
because of a gloomy deterministic Providence, Tarwater must still follow the
will of the God he has rejected. 68 Farnham finds Flannery O'Connor so
gloomy that she cannot even conceive of the salvation of her characters.
Mayhew and Rubin, on the other hand, feel that Tarwater is still free at the
end and is not determined in his choices. 70 Ferris points out that those con-
fused about seeing determinism in the climax have difficulty because they do
not see how the climax must be interpreted in the light of specific shades of
meaning which words and symbols have received throughout the novel. 71

67 Barnabas Davis, "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Belief in Recent Fiction;
Listening (Autumn, 1965), 5-21.

Renascence, XIII (1961), 147-152.

69 James F. Farnham, "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," America, CV

70 Leonard F. X. Mayhew, "Flannery O'Connor: 1925-1964," Commonweal,
LXX (August 12, 1966), 562-3; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Faraway Country:
Writers of the Modern South (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963),
1956, 238-40.

71 Samuel J. Ferris, "The Outside and the Inside." Flannery O'Connor's
*The Violent Bear It Away," Critique, III (1960), 11-19. Although he gives
only one or two hints or examples of what he means, Ferris does offer some
evidence. His evidence is so brief, however, that he does not cover territory
covered by this paper.
Gardiner thinks he liked Flannery O'Connor's book, but admits that he cannot understand the ending; when Tarwater goes to where "the children of God lay sleeping," Gardiner asks, "What is he moving towards?" To resume his prophetic mission? To give himself up because of the crime? To continue a tortured life? Gardiner confesses he cannot tell. 72 Davidson reaches a similar position of arrested judgement. He echoes earlier critics in claiming that "the novel is superior in conception and execution to anything Miss O'Connor had previously published. If the meaning is muddled or indecipherable the fault is probably in the fact that the three characters are so isolated from the general human context. In the end we can found no firm generalization upon them, but tend to view them as irresponsible creatures belonging to some arbitrary world of fantasy." Davidson is repeating the charge that Flannery O'Connor did not translate her metaphor. Davidson points out that the ending is the specific interpretative problem when he notes that at the end Tarwater sees a supernatural burning bush and a vision of loaves and fishes, so that Tarwater knows he must accept his prophetic mission. Such a judgement, of course, directly contradicts the above cited interpretations that the ending finds Tarwater despairing and rejecting prophetism. 73

The insight gained from the examination of Flannery O'Connor's statements of theory, plus a close explication of the text of *The Violent Bear It Away*, should enable this dissertation to shed light on some of those controversies about the novel. This study will not attempt to explicate closely the whole novel; such a lengthy study would not be in keeping with this paper's main purpose of explaining Flannery O'Connor's expository theories. But a very close explication of the climax of *The Violent Bear It Away* will be made because confusion about the climax seems to be what underlies much of the controversy and misunderstanding about the book. Since the last three pages of the novel contain some of the most compact and poetic of Flannery O'Connor's writing and since so many critics have specifically mentioned the ending as a point of confusion, this close attention to the ending should explain what Flannery O'Connor is trying to say there. This analysis can be made with more confidence once the study of Flannery O'Connor's theories points out what the critics should see. It will at the same time provide the most demanding exemplification of how these theories are to be applied to Flannery O'Connor's writings. Eventually this analysis may reveal that the climax is poor and that the whole novel, therefore becomes a disunified confused mass of violent details. This analysis, on the other hand, could reveal that once the critic removes confusion about the meaning of the climax he is able to see how every detail of the novel is building organically up to that climax - that the novel is not
therefore an overgrown short story or a disunified mass of gothic horror.

No previous critic has attempted a lengthy explication of the novel. A few have made rather thorough studies of one or another aspects of its complex texture. Hyman and Drake 74 devote about ten pages to the patterns that recur in Flannery O'Connor's stories, and they examine The Violent Bear It Away in greater detail. Malin and O. T. Snow 75 slant their analyses so that they are concerned merely with details that seem to be modern adaptations of classical gothic devices. Gossett 76 examines the motif of violence; Sr. Gable examines the motif of ecumenism; Ballif examines the motif of homosexual incest.

Several studies examine more deeply the organization and structure of the novel: Sr. Jeremy 77 explicates numerous passages illustrating Flannery O'Connor's use of sound as a symbolic pattern in the novel. Sr. Nolde 78 provides one of the first close analyses of Flannery O'Connor's patterns of symbolism with an introduction to the imagery of silence, hunger and prophecy.

The present study differs from these earlier works in that it will examine not

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77 Sr. Jeremy, "The Violent Bear It Away: A Linguistic Education," Renascence, XVIII (1964), 11-16
just one or two motifs or symbols, but a great many. Further, the present work can be more explicit about the meaning of Flannery O'Connor's details because it will have studied completely her theories about life and literature, and can therefore state much more boldly what significance details in the novel have for Flannery O'Connor. None of the previous works, of course, have studied this relationship between Flannery O'Connor's expository thoughts and the detail of the novel.

Thus, while the present study will not be a complete explication of The Violent Bear It Away, it will explicate the climax closely and it will examine a number of other intense passages in the novel - not only to show the meaning of the climax, but also to attempt to prove that the novel is a unified whole for which the climax, if properly understood, acts as a submit - a smooth, satisfying, and natural gathering of all the strands of connotation, symbolism, and meaning in the novel. This examination, however, serves primarily to give a brief illustration of Flannery O'Connor's theories as they are expressed in her longest story. These two important goals of the present study are useful and necessary in the light of earlier remarks about the current state of critical opinion of Flannery O'Connor - necessary because of Miss O'Connor's reputation, necessary because of the confusion that exists concerning her writing, and necessary because of the so far inadequate explication given to her expository writings and especially to The Violent Bear It Away. As Flannery O'Connor herself said to a beginning writer such close examination - even if it
were of questionable value — "will improve your thinking and sharpen your observation, which all things being equal is good for the soul." 79

CHAPTER I

AVOIDING THE DISJUNCTION BETWEEN BELIEF AND SENSIBILITY: EXCESSIVE BELIEF

The most logical first consideration in Flannery O'Connor's critical theory is what Miss O'Connor herself considered "the first thing you need to realize about fiction": "what the writer does when he writes a story is to try to see an action, or a series of actions, clearly. The key word is see... He wants to see it himself clearly and make the reader see it clearly."¹ The sight metaphor, one of Flannery O'Connor's most frequently used figures, implies several tasks.

One of these tasks involves the question of how the reader comes to view the writer's grasp of the world. "The fiction writer is concerned with the way the world looks first of all. He establishes it by its looks. You should know what a character looks like before you go into his head and say what he is thinking about. You have to convince your reader that he is there."² To other beginning writers, Flannery O'Connor urges the same concern with externals: "my advice is to start reading and writing and looking and listening. Pay less attention to yourself than to what is outside you


²Ibid.

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and if you must write about yourself, get a good distance away and judge

One way to write a poorly written story is to neglect the advice to portray the outside world clearly - to become lost in one's own mind, or, as Miss O'Connor claimed on another occasion, entirely to forget the outside world. "I read some stories at one of the colleges not long ago - all by Southerners - but with the exception of one story, they might all have originated in some synthetic place that could have been anywhere or nowhere. These stories hadn't been influenced by the outside world at all, only by television." For Miss O'Connor, this neglect of the physical world was a sign of the "grim view of the future" of the short story. Flannery O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," Esprit, VII (Winter, 1963), 34.

In "The Partridge Festival," the following discussion between the girl, an abstract thinker who writes non-fiction, and the male novelist occurs:

"Since our forms are different," he said, again with his ironical smile, "we might compare findings."

"I don't mean your abstract findings," the boy said. "I mean your concrete findings. Have you ever seen him? What did he look like? The novelist is not interested in narrow abstractions - particularly when they are obvious. He's . . . ."

"No," she said, "that isn't necessary for me. What he looks like makes no difference - whether he has brown eyes or blue - that's nothing to a thinker."

"you are probably," he said, "afraid to look at him. The novelist is never afraid to look at the real object."

Thus the first thing the author must see is the outside appearance of the physical world, "the real object."

The novelist must, however, see more than merely the outside things. In "The Partridge Festival," the continuation of the conversation indicates that a story "is not a reported incident" merely:

"I would not be afraid to look at him," the girl said angrily, "if it were at all necessary. Whether he has brown eyes or blue is nothing to me."

"There is more to it," Calhoun said, "than whether he has brown eyes or blue. You might find your theories enriched by the sight of him. And I don't mean by finding out the color of his eyes."

Theorizing directly rather than through a fictional character, Miss O'Connor explains that "when we talk about the writer's country, we are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside him. Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner world in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other." The artist who is trying to "see through" to the inside of objects must look for the unique reality that makes a thing what it is:

Conrad said that his aim as an artist was to render the highest possible justice to the created universe. This is the way the fiction writer works . . . by making us see . . . creation; and not just the beautiful or pretty things. You must learn to look

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for whatever is in each person and each thing that makes it itself. Hopkins called this "inscape." Look for this with your eyes open, not with them shut.9

Thus the second thing the author must see is the inside reality that causes that "real object" to be uniquely real, uniquely itself.

What any person sees in the physical world depends of course on his point of view. A wall may be seen as red if the viewer sees the brick on the outside, or as green if he sees the painted plaster in the room. A glass may be seen as half-full if the viewer sees the object in relation to his abilities to succeed - or as half empty. As her comments on "inscape," etc., have already indicated, Flannery O'Connor is concerned with the second, psychological point of view, not with the physical point of view. And Miss O'Connor has a particular relationship within her psychological point of view: "I see from the standpoint of Christian Orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that." To define what is meant by this statement about the "meaning of life," Miss O'Connor adds: "Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live."10

Many of Flannery O'Connor's remarks about her fiction are an attempt to deal with critics who base their case against her writing on a comparison between Miss O'Connor's primary command to see things clearly as they really

are in themselves and her later statements about Redemption. The main source of difficulty for these critics comes when Miss O'Connor adds her second statement about Redemption. The following schema shows what many of these critics have felt is the logical weakness in her thinking: (1) I start with the "standpoint" of orthodoxy, the standpoint that Redemption has a meaning. (2) Redemption is meaningless unless the actual world needs Redemption. (3) Therefore, the world must be the kind of thing that needs Redemption. Claim is made that Flannery O'Connor's a-priori acceptance of Redemption causes her to demand that the world be the sort of thing that needs Redemption - and involves her in a contradiction of the cardinal principle of artists especially in the modern age of "rendered" scenes: her own primary command that the artist must first see things as they really are in themselves. The issue is whether reality comes first (and needs Redemption) or whether Redemption and orthodoxy are primary (and force the writer to picture a false view of Redemption-needing, evil reality).

Flannery O'Connor takes conscious note of these charges that she may be

Critics who make such charges do not explicitly point out that they are justified in their criticism by what they see as a contradiction in Flannery O'Connor's just quoted statements about the nature of fiction. Such a feeling that there is an apparent contradiction in Miss O'Connor's statements, however seems to lie implicitly at the root of remarks by such critics. As Miss O'Connor herself points out, these critics who charge that she must be a poor writer because she is a Catholic usually do not spend too much time searching for evidence to support their charges; they seem to come with the a-priori view that their charges are correct. Some of the most important or explicit of these critics are My Wylie (in general criticism of Catholic authors) and Mr. Hicks, Mr. Baumbach and Mr. Coffey, whose views are summarized below. Other critics have their views cited in the "Introduction" and in Chapter II.
suffering from "the much discussed disjunction between sensibility and belief." She has a firm reply: "in the greatest fiction, the writer's moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense." However, "the question as to what effect Catholic dogma has on the fiction writer who is a Catholic," she recognizes, is a complex one. It is two-sided: "what Mr. Wylie contends is that the Catholic writer, because he believes in certain defined mysteries, cannot, by the nature of things, see straight; and this contention, in effect, is not very different from that made by Catholics who declare that whatever the Catholic writer can see, there are certain things that he should not see, straight or otherwise." Despite her declaration that belief and sensibility should be harmonious, one group of critics claims that Miss O'Connor uses religion, belief, too much; the other group complains that she uses it too little. The fact that the critics cannot agree on which extreme she is guilty of - whether she overuses "sensibility" and the things of this world or "belief" and religious faith - is in itself perhaps a partial answer to the charges.

Those who claim that Miss O'Connor uses religion too strongly agree with Jonathan Baumbach that the "besetting limitation" of Flannery O'Connor is that her theological theme governs her view of reality and sends her off into her


own "private world" which theologically sees things as all good or all bad. Warren Coffey presses the point even further by offhandedly presuming that because Miss O'Connor is a Catholic in America she is "of course" a Jansenist insistent (probably subconsciously in the case of Flannery O'Connor) on showing the goodness of a "desperate assertion of faith" and the evil of "Intellectual Pride," "Irreligion," and sex. Coffey apparently feels that he need not examine her stories too closely; he need only observe that the heritage of an American Catholic cannot "of course" escape Jansenism and that Flannery O'Connor must be a Jansenist dogmatist because she is Irish and went to parochial schools where she was overwhelmed for life - in an ironic understatement by Coffey - by "teachers less bland" than the Chardin she came to admire at the end of her life. If this type of critic will soften his views at all, he will still hold with Granville Hicks that because of their "absolute" quality "there are points at which Miss O'Connor's dogmas seem to falsify her stories" for a person like himself who does not believe in any absolutes. Flannery O'Connor herself summarizes the position of these critics by noting that their objections to her and a-priori to any Catholic novelist range from "the statement of Philip Wylie that 'a Catholic, if he is


devout, i.e., sold on the authority of his Church, is also brain-washed, whether he realizes it or not (and consequently does not have the freedom necessary to be a first-rate creative writer) to the often repeated explanation that the Catholic in this country suffers from a parochial aesthetic and a cultural insularity." Also, "if he takes the Church for what she takes herself to be, the writer must decide what she demands of him and whether she restricts his freedom. The material and method of fiction being what they are the problem may seem greater for the fiction writer than for any other."17

Flannery O'Connor does not deny that theology influences her writing. "I don't think you should write something as long as a novel around anything that is not of the greatest concern to you and everybody else and for me this is always the conflict between an attraction for the holy and ... disbelief."18 She has, however, several often repeated and rephrased replies to the charge that she or any good Catholic author "is out to use fiction to prove the truth of his faith, or at least to prove the existence of the supernatural." With characteristic humility, she admits that the Catholic author "may be" out for propaganda. Such a writer "becomes the victim, not of the Church's dogmas, but of a false conception of their \[the dogmas'] demands." Yet no author,

17 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.

including Flannery O'Connor, "can be sure of his motives except as they suggest themselves in his finished work." Her first reply that one can never be sure of his motives puts slightly ironical emphasis on how she is not as dogmatic even in her rebuttal as her critics who charge her with excessive dogmatism. They are the ones who judge a-priori.

Secondly, Flannery O'Connor observes that critics and writers with the a-priori view that a Catholic writer cannot write good fiction have "many-well-grounded complaints . . . about religious literature on the score that it tends to minimize the importance and dignity of life here and now in favor of life in the next world or in favor of miraculous manifestations of grace."

With such a "hostile audience," whatever the justification for the hostility, the Catholic writer must "be more than ever concerned to have his work stand on its own feet and be complete and self-sufficient and impregnable in its own right. When people have told me that because I am a Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, ruefully, that because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist." Even if her fiction were going to be the most effective propaganda, therefore, it would have to give the greatest attention to the things of this world in order to reach the people for whom it would be intended. "I think that the more a writer wishes to make the supernatural apparent, the more real he has to be able to make the natural world, 


20 Ibid., 734.
for if the readers don't accept the natural world, they'll certainly not accept anything else."²¹ For those who reject the supernatural and accept only the natural, fiction must be valid as a thing of nature.

Flannery O'Connor's most important reply to the charge of dogmatism is that the charge is based on false premises. It is based on the notion that dogma restricts the writer from interpreting honestly. Belief does not distort the writer's view of reality: "I think there is danger in talking about the Catholic writer as if his religion blotted out or stood in opposition to his personality. The notion that Catholic writers are not free comes about by thinking that being a Catholic is something imposed from the outside against one's feelings. You are a Catholic writer because you accept what the Church teaches, not because the Church is a vise in which you are caught." Flannery O'Connor with characteristic humor admits, however, that while she does not "feel any responsibility to do this [to warp reality] as a Catholic writer," she personally gets "considerable glee . . . when it just happens" that she can justify her beliefs in writing. In fact she is especially amused by seeing that the title of her usual talk at colleges, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," "makes a lot of people in the schools nervous" because they think she is going to preach "a lot of sixteenth-century dust."²² Belief does not distort the writer's view of reality, nor does it cause something to be


missing from the reality viewed: "Belief in Christian dogma" is not "a
hindrance to the writer . . . It is not a set of rules which fixes what he
sees in the world." 23 "A belief in fixed dogma cannot fix what goes on in
life or blind the believer to it. It will, of course, add to the writer's
observation a dimension which many cannot, in conscience, acknowledge; but as
long as what they can acknowledge is present in the work, they cannot claim
that any freedom has been denied the artist. A dimension taken away is one
thing; a dimension added is another." 24

An analogy can be drawn from physics at this point. A given volume of
space may contain a certain number of protons and electrons. The same volume
of space might, however, receive an additional number of protons and electrons.
It will be a different, heavier element as the observer witnesses it. But no
injustice or distortion has been done to that volume or to the matter
originally contained in it. If the observer wishes to observe only the
original protons and electrons, they are still there and operating in the same
way -- although the physicist may consider such a person foolish for ignoring
the other material added. The old phenomenon is still present; things now
simply have a greater density. Likewise, Flannery O'Connor argues, the writer
can add the supernatural to the matters of a world-view or volume. No
injustice has been done to the natural world, although a greater density is
present to the volume-of-space or story which reflects it. The observer cannot

complain that the writer has falsified the protons and electrons originally present or changed the volume. And the reader cannot complain that the natural must have been lost or falsified simply because the supernatural was added; the story simply has greater density now. The supernatural did not hit the natural like a bullet and explode it. This is true even though the resulting work will quite properly seem different to the observer, as did the atom with other materials added. The observer can still look upon an unfalsified original if he desires, although the writer like the physicist may consider such an observer to be foolish. If the writer is one, like Flannery O'Connor, who sees the meaning of life in the supernatural, in the Redemption, then his view of life will reflect that belief and perhaps be controlled by it. He will not necessarily distort that basic life he sees, however, if on the other hand, the reader is one who looks upon the idea of Redemption as nonsense, he may have difficulty in accepting as real the characters of the novelist whose world is Redemption-centered. But he need not have that difficulty; he need accept only part of that novelist's world (he will have the same volume, no distortion, merely a less dense view). Orthodoxy does not change fiction by making it false nor by making it lack something. It gives fiction extra reality packed in more densely. A writer or critic should have no complaint that a second level of so-called supernatural meaning is present - as long as the primary level of natural meaning is present and proper. Can the fiction be "proper" when it has the supernatural? That is, can the atom-fiction be "proper" when it has extra protons and electrons (the supernatural) stuffed in with it? That is an artistic question that depends on the rules of art: "If we intend to encourage Catholic fiction writers, we must convince those coming
along that the Church does not restrict their freedom to be artists but in-
sures it (the restrictions of art are another matter."

The rules of art do not prohibit these deeper levels of supernatural meaning - whatever they do entail.

In any event, Flannery O'Connor argues from personal experience that dogma does not impede a writer: "I have heard it said that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer, but I myself have found nothing further from the truth." Whatever may be the practice of other writers she herself does not "deliberately set out to present" a story as a vehicle for making the audience "aware of and sympathetic with" her outlook on life. "I think that view [ of life] comes of itself, but I deliberately set out to make it work as a legitimate piece of fiction." Flannery O'Connor, therefore, replies to charges that Catholic authors must be dogmatists whose belief conflicts with their view of reality. She replies that such an a-priori charge is itself mere dogmatism though possibly true for individual artists, that the charge makes little sense because such supernatural propaganda would fail to make its desired contact with those who believe in nature only, that because the supernatural adds on extra dimension to nature it does not thereby have to destroy nature, and that in any event such propagandism is foreign to her own conscious experience as a writer.

25 Ibid.


There is a final paradox. Flannery O'Connor notes that "it is interesting to find" those who criticize her for lack of emphasis on beliefs - the next group of her critics whom we shall examine - "sharing, even for a split second, the intellectual bed" of those who criticize her for excessive emphasis on belief. In other words, since both charges imply disjunction of belief from sensibility and deny Flannery O'Connor's view of the nature of the creative artist and his fiction, additional arguments against the charge of didacticism can be obtained from her replies to those who criticize her for lack of didacticism.
CHAPTER II

AVOIDING THE DISJUNCTION BETWEEN BELIEF AND SENSIBILITY
EXCESSIVE SENSIBILITY

A second group criticizes Flannery O'Connor for separation between belief and reality. The second group claims that she uses belief and affirmative values too little. There are two general types of critics who make this claim: (1) those who complain about Miss O'Connor's "unnecessary distortion" or "gratuitous grotesques," and (2) those - about one-half of whom are Catholics of the "old school" - who expect Miss O'Connor to be more of a propagandist for good.

Perhaps the sharpest complaint about O'Connor's lack of noble principle comes in Robert O. Bowen's attack on The Violent Bear It Away: "The particular kind of natural law that governs the world of this novel is stark, dark, and distinctly deterministic." It is a "distinctly anti-Catholic book" in which consciousness provides only an awareness of suffering and cannot lead to any higher state or alleviation. 1 Oliver LaFarge condemns Wise Blood as an attempt to obtain mere humor by the natural and calm narration of how

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values are turned inside out. 2 Time said that A Good Man Is Hard to Find is a book in which "nobody is noble," a book in which one cannot expect "Ferocious Flannery" to weaken her whallop by groping around for a . . . meaning." 3 Later Time condemned the macabre in The Violent Bear It Away: though Flannery O'Connor's "handling of God-drunk backwoodsmen is based in religious seriousness in the author's stated critical opinions, it seldom seems to rise above an ironic jape." 4 Hubert Creekmore complains that Flannery O'Connor presents no character as a norm accepting Christianity or any orthodox viewpoint, has numerous "gratuitous scenes," does not have characters change for better or worse so that they can be judged, and in general is so confusing that a critic cannot determine any "religious philosophy" she may be "driving at." 5 Most critics hostile to Miss O'Connor's lack of obvious "inspiration" eventually cite William Esty's summary: "Overingenious horrors are presumably meant to speak to us of the Essential Nature of Our Time, but when the very real and cruel grotesquerie of our world is converted into clever gimmicks for The Partisan Review, we may be


3 "Such Nice People," Time, LXV (June 5, 1955), 114.

4 "God-Intoxicated Hillbillies," Time, LXX (February 29, 1960), 121.

forgiven for reacting with the self-same disgust as the little old lady from Dubuque." Of the world and tone of Wise Blood, William Goyen says that the book presents not so much "accursed or victimized" humans as a "company of ill-tempered /people/ and /a/ driven collection of one-dimensional creatures of sheer meanness and orneryness." In such a world as this "all living things have vanished and what remains exists in a redemptionless clashing of unending vengeance, alienated from any source of understanding, the absence of which does not even define a world of darkness, not even that - for there has been no light to take away." Brother Luke Grande indicates that even his theological agreement with Flannery O'Connor does not help him better interpret the excessive grotesqueness of her stories: the theme of her stories is "not of grace, but of the absence of grace in an almost diabolical world."
The excessive grotesqueness comes because "almost too consistently the profound metaphoric grasp that controls her themes is obscured by the shock of eccentric characters and situations. Her limited appeal, like a taste for caviar or escargots, is a measure of weakness." Miss O'Connor is criticized

6 William Esty, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, LXVII (March 7, 1958), 588
for so greatly stressing the grotesque and evil of this world that she neglects to show these distortions as evil and neglects to define the nature of good.

Flannery O'Connor gives the classic reply of the "misunderstood" author: "my characters are described as despairing only by superficial critics. Very few of my characters despair and those who do, don't reflect my views." Miss O'Connor's detailed replies to those charges of pessimism and gratuitous grotesquerie, were the occasion for her setting forth her her philosophy of life and literature. A study of these replies, therefore, shows Miss O'Connor's refutations of the charge that her fiction is lacking in belief, and, more positively, shows how those who are not "superficial critics" can by closer study learn to see what her stories mean.

Miss O'Connor's initial response to the problem of grotesqueness is intuitive. The problem of subject matter for writing is "first of all a matter of vocation, and a vocation is a limiting factor which extends even to the kind of material the writer is able to apprehend imaginatively. The writer can choose what he writes about but he cannot choose what he is able to make live, and so far as he is concerned a living deformed character is acceptable and a dead whole one is not." "It is characters like The Misfit

and the Bible salesmen that I can make live." Although, "it is always difficult to get across to people who are not professional writers that a talent to write does not mean a talent to write anything at all," Miss O'Connor knows that "the longer you write the more conscious you are of what you can and cannot make live." Elizabeth Bishop tells of sending Flannery O'Connor "a cross in a bottle, like a ship in a bottle, crudely carved, with all the instruments of the Passion, the ladder, pliers, dice, etc., in wood, paper, and tinfoil, with a little rooster at the top of the cross. I thought it was the kind of innocent religious grotesquity /sic/ she might like." Flannery O'Connor replied that she was fascinated by the "altar cloth a little dirty from the fingers of whoever cut it out" and the grotesque incongruity of the detailed rooster with the religious symbols. She was "altogether taken with it" because "it's what I'm born to appreciate." 

Perhaps O'Connor's appeal to intuition as an explanation for her grotesques can be explained by the story of Willie. Flannery O'Connor felt that

she "was only capable of dealing with another Willie," a mischievous child described by Mother Alphonse, Hawthorne's daughter and foundress of a group of nuns called Servants of The Relief For Incurable Cancer. Although Willie's "'mystic' " look replaced his " 'sturdy gaze of satanic vigor' " when he was taught catechism, and although the nuns saved extra good food for him, bought him gifts, and petted him, Willie " 'uttered exclamations that hideously rang in the ears of the profane themselves,' " stole and sold even holy cards, threw bricks at passers-by, and " 'built a particularly large bondfire' " on the woodshed when given the chance. Miss O'Connor can write about Willie but not about the almost overly saintly Mary Ann whose inspirational biography the nuns wanted Miss O'Connor to write. Miss O'Connor concluded that for her talents, for her vocation, "bad children are harder to endure than good ones but they are easier to write about." Miss O'Connor was pleased when these nuns agreed that she "had" to write about the grotesque for the same reason that these nuns "had" to take care of the ugly sores of cancer - an intuitive perception of vocation.16

Miss O'Connor's next response to the charge of grotesqueness is similar to her first response to the charge of didacticism. She rejects any conscious attempt to corrupt people or to take any conscious delight in the grotesque:

until I read it in the papers." 17 But stories may subconsciously show tendencies not intended by authors: "in some cases, these writers may be unconsciously infected with the Manichean delight is the judgement of John Hawkes brought against Flannery O'Connor. He felt that "the creative process threatens the holy throughout Flannery O'Connor's fiction, "because the creative process transforms the writer's objective Catholic knowledge of the devil into an authorial attitude in itself in some measure diabolical."

The evil or disbelief of the times is as attractive to Flannery O'Connor as the holy. Hawkes felt that the main problem in studying Flannery O'Connor was the problem of "aesthetic authority," the problem of which factor in the conflict the author's judgement was supporting or rejecting. He thought that perhaps Flannery O'Connor's mind or beliefs supported orthodox holiness, while her "creative process," her emotions and force of personality, her "sensibility," took even greater delight in the evil. 19 Miss O'Connor can see the possibility that she had been "unconsciously infected" and that


Hawkes' charge is true: "I have written several stories which did not seem to me to have any grotesque characters in them at all, but which have immediately been labeled grotesque by non-Southern readers."20 Perhaps her artistic sensitivity is, therefore, somewhat in error. But there is a question of definition involved: "the problem may well become one of finding something that is not grotesque and of deciding what standards we would use in looking."21 She claims that those who think that because she writes about evil she likes evil base their thinking on a mistaken proposition:

In an introduction to a collection of his stories called Rotting Hill, Wyndham Lewis has written, "if I write about a hill that is rotting, it is because I despise rot." The general accusation passed against writers now is that they write about rot because they love it. Some do, and their works may betray them, but it is impossible not to believe some write about rot because they see it and recognize it for what it is.22

In a letter to John Hawkes she maintained that this emphasis on the diabolic is a reflection of the "literal devil" and of "the disbelief... that we breathe in with the air of our times."23 Possibly a subconscious empathy, therefore, explains Flannery O'Connor's vivid emphasis on the grotesque.

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But even as she admits this possibility, Miss O'Connor suggests that the evil may just as subconsciously be in the eye of the beholder, her accusers.

Flannery O'Connor also rejects the notion that her "preoccupation with the grotesque" can be blamed "on the fact that here we have a Southern writer and that this is just the type of imagination that Southern life fosters."

Critics suggest that Southern anguish "is a result of our isolation from the rest of the country. I feel that this would be news to most Southern writers."

Being a Southern author does not make her writing grotesque because there is really no such thing as the "Southern school." "Most readers these days must be sufficiently sick of hearing about Southern writers and Southern writing and what so many reviewers insist upon calling the Southern school. No one has ever made plain just what the Southern school is or what writers belong to it."

The claim that grotesqueness is caused by Southerness, therefore, "creates confusion, as most readers rely on various critical cliches to explain Southern literature that don't [sic] explain anything" - a cliche categorizing all Southern writers as those who are "known to be anguished," "unhappy combinations of Poe and Erskine Caldwell." Even as a cliche the notion of a "Southern school has its weakness. Critics seem to posit two


opposite types of Southern writing. "Sometimes, when it is most respectable, it seems to mean the little group of Agrarians that flourished at Vanderbilt in the 20's; but more often the term conjures up an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of a preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque." 26 Being a Southern author does not make her writing grotesque, therefore, because the notion of a Southern school is an unproved cliche and because there are contradictory notions about the meaning of the term "Southern writing."

Moreover, being a Southern author does not make her writing grotesque because Southern life is not more grotesque than that in other parts of the country. Southern writers often write about freaks "because we can still recognize one" 27 - because the Southerner's "social situation demands more of him than that elsewhere in this country. It requires considerable grace for two races to live together, particularly when the population is divided about 50-50 between them and when they have our particular history." Southerners recognize freaks, evil. The problem of human evil is more obvious in the South because the South has a firm traditional moral code and because this clash (between the two races) reminds a Southerner and especially Southern


writers that "we're all grotesque." Grotesqueness is a human condition. The trouble is not unique to the South; "the anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are forced out, not only of our many sins but of our few virtues." As proof she cites not only her own consciousness but also "the many complaints made about the modern American novelist" - complaints, as in a Life magazine survey that literature is not showing the joy of life itself:

The writer whose position is Christian, and probably also the writer whose position is not, will begin to wonder at this point if there could not be some ugly correlation between our unparalleled prosperity and the stridency of these demands for a literature that shows us the joy of life. He may at least be permitted to ask if these screams for joy could be quite so piercing if joy were really more abundant in our prosperous society.

I find it hard to believe that what is observable behavior in one section can be entirely without parallel in another. At least, of late, Southern writers have had the opportunity of pointing out that none of us invented Elvis Presley and that youth is himself probably less an occasion for concern than his popularity.

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which is not restricted to the Southern part of the country. 30

Flannery O'Connor concludes that the problem of the grotesque may be a problem proper to the audience and modern culture rather than a defect of the writer's personality or geographic origin. Thus it is not the texture of Southern life that is grotesque: "But it does seem evident that the Southern writer is particularly adept at recognizing the grotesque; and to recognize the grotesque you have to have some notion of what is not grotesque and why..." 31

Thus Flannery O'Connor's critics call her writings grotesque not because she subconsciously delights in evil but because modern culture itself is a distortion that is shocked at the truly normal because it is different from prevailing beliefs.

30 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 159, 160, 162. These concepts implying the finiteness of man are used again in developing Miss O'Connor's judgements about the weakness, typical of modern society as a whole, See pp. 90-98.


Miss O’Connor’s fourth response to the charge that she does not sufficiently balance the attractions of good and evil illuminates several important areas - her own quality of mind and philosophy of the human being, some of her ideas about the theory of fiction, and her explanation of the just mentioned weaknesses of contemporary society. Rather than merely deny the positive charge of excessive grotesqueness Miss O’Connor’s fourth response examines the negative challenge that her writing is grotesque by being insufficiently affirmative.

Flannery O’Connor herself recognized and restated the position of those who thought that she and most other Catholic authors were insufficiently affirmative. 

Supposedly the Catholic novelist fails because he does “not write within a ‘Catholic framework’ ”; that is, because he

is failing to reflect the virtue of hope, failing to show the Church’s interest in social justice, failing to present our beliefs in a life that will make them desirable to others. He occasionally writes well, but he always writes wrong.

Frequently in reading articles about the failures of the Catholic novelist, you will get the idea that he is to raise himself from the stuff of his own imagination by beginning with Christian principles and finding the life that will illustrate them. That is the procedure, I

The reader should note ironically the fact that Miss O’Connor must here defend herself against the charge of being insufficiently affirmative while previously we saw her forced to defend herself against the charge of being excessively affirmative (see the preceding chapter). The very fact that critics cannot agree on which of these two extremes is true of Miss O’Connor is one piece of evidence arguing that she is guilty of neither extreme.
gather, that is going to guarantee that all of his work will be positive. Positive is a word which none of these articles can do without. 

In thus challenging the artist to be positive, readers should remember that a "purely affirmative vision cannot be demanded of him without limiting his freedom to observe what man has done with the things of God." By asking the writer "to make Christianity desirable they are asking you to describe its essence, not what you see." Such readers are demanding that the writer produce a vision of perfect Christianity - as it may exist in the abstract or in heaven, but not as it is on earth. They and the writer must realize, however, that "ideal Christianity doesn't exist, because anything the human being touches, even Christian truth he deforms slightly in his own image. Even the saints do this." Readers must remember what man "has done with the things of God." Especially Christian readers who demand this "purely affirmative" view should also remember "the effects of original sin" when they consider whether or not this purely affirmative view is possible. Much trouble comes because readers interpret "a little corruption as total corruption." Much trouble comes because readers forget the distinction between an affirmative view and a purely affirmative view. The purely affirmative view is unrealis-

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ically naive and produces "traditional hagiography," "edifying literature," and produces "apologetic fiction." 37 Advocates of this apologetic fiction paradoxically apologize with the worse apologists: "The best of them think: make it look desirable because it is desirable. And the rest of them think: make it look desirable so I won't look like a fool for holding it." 38

Again and again Flannery O'Connor disassociated herself from this naive propagandistic view that a good man must concern himself only with the purely affirmative. She felt that this view was caused by a sentimental exaggeration. "For my part I have never cared to read about little boys who build up altars and play they are priests, or about little girls who dress up as nuns, or about those pious Protestant children who lack this equipment but brighten the corners where they are" - because such "stories of pious children tend to be false." 39 Years at a parochial school attendance at daily Mass and communion, and a pilgrimage to Lourdes in an attempt to cure her lupus might give Flannery O'Connor the appearance of "traditional piety"; she was "no disbeliever in spiritual purpose and no vague believer. Very seriously she wrote from Lourdes.

to Katherine Anne Porter: "the sight of Faith and affliction joined in prayer - very impressive." Such manifestations of orthodox acts should calm critics who judge an author by his biography. But Flannery O'Connor was unrelenting in exposing mere "traditional piety" as an unrealistic exaggeration that forgets "what man has done with the things of God." She stresses how this view exaggerates by describing it as "Cathlick" - an undue emphasis on peculiarity of pronunciation to parallel the undue and unthinking emphasis of the propagandistic viewpoint. She mocks the unreal way this viewpoint detaches one from reality when she tells Richard Stern: "it seems you are being reviewed


Flannery O'Connor, Letter to Richard Stern, cited by Richard Stern, "Flannery O'Connor: A Remembrance and Some Letters," Shenandoah, XVI (1965), 8. That Flannery O'Connor was not simply condemning all things Catholic in a perverse attempt to show how Catholicism is real and part of the real world is shown by her serious comments about her reviews: "there were enough Catholic reviews which share my own interpretation of it for me to feel that I succeeded well enough in doing what I intended to do" (Flannery O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 71). While she can humorously assault the usual Catholic pamphlets as "pure bad" and can feel that the four Catholic newspapers she subscribed to were "enough Catholic papers to kill anybody," she does still receive the four papers from widely scattered areas in the country although the usual Catholic household would often not even receive its own local diocesan newspaper. She has, she says, "reason for being interested in each" of these papers - because of their good style, because they "let you know what good writing can be found elsewhere," and because they reprint a "lot of good addresses and such." Thus Flannery O'Connor's position is that these Catholic publications are acceptable if they have learned that "the point is they ought to be good . . . mighty good"; if they stoop to narrow partisan exaggerations she makes fun of them under the principle that "each one that is no good is one too many" (Flannery O'Connor, "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," 30-31).
exclusively in Catholic magazines. This is what you get for being a Catholic writer. Ha." 44

Miss O'Connor’s opposition to "traditional piety" appears again in her remarks about the modernness of a Catholic college, in her humorous condescension in explaining what a rosary is, in the appearance of unthinking mechanicalness as she describes a rosary to be a thing merely to "finger," and in the paternalistic authoritarian "son" as if the fettering spirit of the protective inquisition were hovering over the individual: "I am going to talk at Rosary College - the thing you finger, son - in River Forest wherever that is and then I am going on to Notre Dame. If I can find a telephone at Rosary College, you can expect to hear my unformed tones over it inquiring as to your health. However, this may be a medieval institution and they may not have telephones." 45

In the same vein, Flannery O'Connor teased the Dominicans who were writing the biography of Mary Ann. Parroting what she felt would be the party line of "traditional piety," Flannery O'Connor told the nuns that "Mary Ann could not have been much but good, considering her environment." She was pleased when, instead of the usual agreeing cliché, one of the nuns more


45 Ibid.
realistically flashed an "unpredictable" look, said "'we've had some demons!'" - and with a "gesture of her hand dismissed my ignorance."  

Such narrow propagandism is for Flannery O'Connor as wrong in writing as it is in life. Evidently the champions of an affirmative vision think that "we can close our own eyes and that the eyes of the Church will do the seeing. They will not... When the Catholic novelist closes his own eyes and tries to see with the eyes of the Church, the result is another addition to that large body of pious trash for which we have so long been famous."  

Miss O'Connor finds this traditionalism as much a dogmatic a-priori divorce of belief and sensibility as was Wylie's charge that Catholic authors ipso facto must stress belief ahead of reality: "Catholics who declare that whatever the Catholic writer can see, there are certain things that he should not see, straight or otherwise... are the Catholics who are victims of the parochial esthetic and the cultural insularity and it is interesting to find them sharing, even for a split second, the intellectual bed of Mr. Wylie." The result is as much a lack of truth as the exaggerations of Catholic publications: "When the finished work suggests that pertinent actions have been fraudulently manipulated or overlooked or smothered, whatever purposes the writer started out with have been defeated. What the fiction writer will discover, if

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46 O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35.

he discovers anything at all, is that he himself cannot move or mould reality in the interests of abstract truth." 48 Although she may have doubted their ability to produce good reading, Flannery O'Connor agreed that the Dominican biographers had good reason to think that people "don't want a pious recital. We want a good story with a real impact on other lives as Mary Ann herself had that impact on each life she touched." 49 To Sister Alice, Miss O'Connor again affirmed the paradox that the traditionalists are the unreal exaggerators while the grotesque writer is more real: "If you have a detail that is just the traditional kind of prettiness, reject it, and look for one that is closer to the heart of the matter, that is a little more grotesque, but that gives us a better idea of the reality of the thing." Later she repeated to Sister Alice that a character in Sister's story was "100 per cent cardboard ... too onesided to be believable." 50 Miss O'Connor praised liberal theologian Chardin, and took from him the title of her last book. 51 She who praised Ecumenism, 52 faulted traditional Catholic mentality as "great unparaphrased logic, formula, instant and correct answers." Together with the forward-looking Pope John she

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51 Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xxx.

hoped that although "the changes will take a long time to soak through," the Council would expose traditional prettiness and "edifying literature" as un-truthful exaggerations. 53

To understand why Miss O'Connor felt that the purely affirmative view was an untruthful exaggeration impossible both as a philosophy of life and as a basis for writing, one must piece together a bit more of Flannery O'Connor's theory of fiction. "What the fiction writer will discover, if he discovers anything at all, is that he himself cannot move or mould reality in the interests of abstract truth." Starting with reality and not with purely affirmative theory, the fiction writer must be "humble in the face of what is." 54 Material that starts by seeking to edify will therefore "tend to be false" and usually amusing Miss O'Connor admonished Sister Alice that "no matter what you write I see that it is going to be in the category of 'edifying' literature, so you should remember that the word 'edify' used to mean 'to build a house, raise an edifice.' When you write a story that is edifying then, it should be solid, with no useless bricks and with enough support not to fall down when the Big Bad Wolf (me) huffs and puffs outside of it." 55

The brick is reason. It is something hard and solid - reason. Its opposite is mere emotion. Miss O'Connor indicates that emotion is the opposite of reason when she characterizes it with an image exactly the opposite

54 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.
of the brick image. As opposed to hard, solid reason that builds and supports
an edifice of worth literature, mere emotion produces the "soggy, formless,
and sentimental literature" of gushing feeling. "When I write, I am a maker.
I think about what I am making. Saint Thomas called art reason in making." 56

Feeling alone produces stories about "little boys who build altars and
play they are priests, or about little girls who dress up as nuns" because it
takes these actions as virtues. These actions are not virtues; virtue demands
reason and choice. These actions are stories "told by adults, who see
virtue" where the children "see only a practical course of action," 57 adults
who have abandoned reason, who rest content to ascribe virtue to mere"act-
ions" obviously unmotivated by more than what is a practical gain. Virtue
would exist if reason were present. Virtue would exist if these children were
acting with religious reason; virtue would exist if these story tellers would not
rest content with mere feeling of virtue (a physical thing, an emotion, in-
spired by the physical appearances of what the children are doing). For
Flannery O'Connor reason is a prime ingredient of art.

Miss O'Connor stressed how her task as a writer went against the
emotions: "Publishing a book is not my favorite sport; it's a necessary evil
but I put it off as long as possible." 58  

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56O'Connor, Letter to Sr. Mariella Gable, 26; O'Connor, "The Church
and the Fiction Writer," 733.
whether or not American writing was different in the 1950's, Flannery O'Connor replied with a brevity that reinforced her idea: "I presume that writing in any age is equally a chore. I would not have found it less difficult in 250, 1350, or 5050." Also, she used to joke about how it took her seven painful years to produce each book. Flannery O'Connor often indicated one function reason played in her vocation as a writer. Her remarks above on the difficulty of writing and her frequent references to her daily writing schedule indicate her belief that a writer is one whose work is shaped by discipline - reason directing actions to a desired goal: "I write from 9 to 12, and spend the rest of the day recuperating from it." To Sister Alice, Miss O'Connor said of this period from nine to twelve that "It comes very hard to me... It is real hard work. Often nothing comes of my efforts. I rewrite, edit, throw away. It's slow and searching." When a group of college students asked about her daily writing habits, Flannery O'Connor showed just how extreme her discipline sometimes became:

60 O'Connor, Letter to Richard Stern, 8, 10.
Miss O'Connor never let the students believe that writing was - at least for her - anything but hard work. She worked in the mornings. She forced herself to keep a regular schedule of morning work. At the beginning, she said, she put a bucket of water under the table as she wrote, and put her feet in the bucket. When she wanted to get away from the typewriter, it was such a bother to get her feet out and dried that she finally stayed at the typewriter. 63

Miss O'Connor reenforced her point about the need for reason in writing when she criticized those who claim that writing is a matter of inspiration: "'If I waited for inspiration, I'd still be waiting.'" Those who have "writers' temperaments are not doing any writing." 64 A writer is a craftsman who adjusts means to a conscious goal, not an emoter with an "untouchable sensibility that ought to be left to its pleasure." 65

It is a "particularly pernicious and untruthful" myth to feel that the writer is a lonely sufferer because he "exists in a state of sensitivity which cuts him off, or raises him above, or casts him below the community around him." Writers would do well to abandon this cliché, which is a "hangover" from the romantic period with its image of the writer as a rebel. Although


64 Margaret Inman Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" Colorado Quarterly, X (1962), 385, 381.

there have probably been "enough genuinely lonely suffering novelists to make this seem a reasonable myth," their suffering and loneliness resulted from personal character defects of the writers and not from "the vocation of writing itself" --- because by his choice of the medium of idea-bearing words, a writer's "aim is communication," conveying ideas, reason and not mere inspirations of feeling. 66

Miss O'Connor was certainly not opposed to genuine feeling and emotion in literature or in life. Very emphatically she spoke out against situations where reason alone was stressed, where no emotion was present: "It is doubtful how much religious instruction or inspiration can be got out of abstractions coupled with secondhand emotions and all the clichés in the book. I am in no position to say what the general level of preaching is today in the Church. You can't expect every priest to sound like Newman, but you can expect to feel that the sermon is fresh and that it has at least passed through the head and heart of the preacher recently." She felt that such use of reason without emotion was more than simply boring in itself; it also influenced those who would hear such a sermon to be less "likely to recognize genuine sentiment" if they "met it in a novel or story or poem." 67 The mechanics and the content of the statement indicate Flannery O'Connor's dislike of excessive


rationalism when she wrote Richard Stern: "I think of you often in that cold place among them interleckchuls."\(^{68}\) She honors the emotions, even the most traditional of emotions, when she tells an audience that "for purely human reasons, and for some important literary ones too, awards are valuable in direct ratio to how near they come from home."\(^{69}\) The same dislike for excessive rationalism shows itself again in the mechanics and in the stress on the informal pronunciation, discussion setting, the incongruous table-formality, and the vastness of topic - as she mocked the intellectual self-importance of how at a college's "Southern Litry festival" she, Eudora Welty, Andrew Lytle, and Cleanth Brooks "all discussed Whut Makes Suthen Lit-ratoor Great around a panel table." Flannery O'Connor can take on a pose of anti-intellectualism even: "As for me I don't read anything but the newspaper and the Bible. Everybody else did that it would be a better world /sic/\(^{70}\). That this was merely a pose can be seen by observing how widely her reading ranged - in quality and in quantity.\(^{71}\) Miss O'Connor is making the point that

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\(^{68}\)O'Connor, Letter to Richard Stern, 6.


\(^{70}\)O'Connor, Letter to Richard Stern, 6, 9.

\(^{71}\)Miss O'Connor read Nathanial West and urged Fitzgerald to read As I Lay Dying. She could carry on arguments about Newman, the Divine Comedy, and French Literature. She was inspired to make blindness a motif in Wise Blood by having read the Oedipus plays (Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xv). She was familiar with Chardin, with Death in Venice, Death of a Salesman, Death in the Afternoon, Death of a Man, with Hawthorne and Dostoevsky, with Camus and with Katherine Ann Porter (O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 32, 35).
excessive reason without emotion is not proper. She did not try to judge her own works analytically after she wrote them; again the place of emotion is stressed. "I suppose the standards are largely instinctive. I have a sort of feeling for what I'm doing." She felt that Hawthorne had overcome the excessive rationalism of his "insulated" "habit of observation" when he could overcome his "customary reserve" and shyness "of actual contact with human beings" - when he could show true heart, emotion, and sympathy instead of mere lone reason and "ice in the blood." 

Her frequent jibes at those who would over-intellectualize literature is another way of showing how Flannery O'Connor realized that mere reason was not the only thing necessary: "I really did know what a symbol was until I started reading about them. . . . So many students approach a story as if it were a problem in algebra: find X and when they find X they can dismiss the rest of it." Definitions of the short story are a "hellish question inspired by the devil who tempts textbook publishers. I have been writing stories for fifteen years without a definition of one." Flannery O'Connor best stated

her objections to such over-rationalistic intricacies when Lawrence Perrine asked her about symbolical suggestions for the name May in the story "Greenleaf": "As for Mrs. May, I must have named her that because I knew some English teacher would write and ask my why. I think you folks sometimes strain the soup too thin." 76

Miss O'Connor objected to lack of emotion in a novel's content as well as in a writer's or critic's judgements. She quoted with approval Henry James's dictum that the value "of a piece of fiction depended on the amount of 'felt life' that was in it." 77 The novelist in "Partridge Festival" is "not interested in narrow abstractions - particularly when they're obvious." 78 Miss O'Connor examines one of the statements calling for Catholic novelists to "explore the possibilities inherent in certain positive factors which make Catholic life and the Catholic position in this country increasingly challenging." Her mocking reply indicates that both the phrasing of this proposal and the general ideas of those who demand this "purely affirmative" approach are faulty because of excessive intellection: "This whole attitude of what it would be good to do or have, to supply a general need, is totally opposite to


77 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.

the novelist's own approach. No serious novelist 'explores possibilities inherent in factors.' When critics would insist that she write propaganda to illustrate abstract dogma, as we have seen, Flannery O'Connor replied that she could not accept that theory of writing. For Miss O'Connor use of reason alone was not a satisfactory approach to life or to literature.

Miss O'Connor sees reason and feeling as equally necessary. "I get disturbed when I read articles that imply that the novel is about how man feels and that this is something belief doesn't enter into. The novelist does more than just... deal with feeling. Good fiction involves the whole range of human judgement." Fiction is feeling - but more than that it is judgement also. Fiction is thinking and feeling. "I think the novelist does more than just show us how a man feels. I think he also makes a judgement on the value of that feeling."

In her most direct statement demanding the use of reason Flannery O'Connor repeats the notion that reason and the unreasonable are both engaged in making fiction: "When I write, I feel I am engaged in the reasonable use of

81 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," 34. Later this paper will show that Flannery O'Connor is not urging didactic literature, etc. - see pages 184-5. She follows this present statement about the need for judgement in novels with the observation that this novelistic judgement "may not be overt judgement," that "probably it will be sunk in the work."
the unreasonable. In art the reason goes wherever the imagination goes."^82
Flannery O'Connor has not begun to explain why she feels that the two must
go together. Actually this theory is one that concerned her a great deal, al-
though she never spoke about it directly as she did about how her writings
made use of religion, the grotesque, or the South. Because it concerned her'
deeply, she evolved four different strands of proof to support her thinking.
We will now examine these various proofs that both reason and emotion are
necessary. All four are implied in the above quotation.

Miss O'Connor's first proof is her usual initial response to a question
of theory - that her own experience argued for or against the position.
Flannery O'Connor notes that when she writes she thinks, and that when she
writes she can "feel" or know intuitively that she is working with the un-
reasonable, with the imagination (her usual artistic substitute for the word
"emotion" or "feeling"). Miss O'Connor repeated this argument at a college
lecture: when an eager student questioned whether the artist can use only
the imagination - only the feelings and not reason - Flannery O'Connor smil-
ingly replied: "One way to learn whether you can swim on the kitchen table is
to try it." She was not, however, denying the imagination; she had just

answered another question: "Of course, use your imagination on what you know." Flannery O'Connor's insistence on fiction as a product of both reason and feeling is seen in both these statements. Since fiction uses the medium of words and since words inevitably work on the mind, to write fiction with merely imagination is to forget about the medium - as is the case with someone who felt he could swim on the kitchen table. Such a swimmer valued the physical actions over the medium of water - much to his own distress. In the other statement Flannery O'Connor wants use of imagination or feeling - but only on what the writer knows. The know, reason, must play a part.

Secondly, Flannery O'Connor argues that it is reason which characteristicly seeks causes and effects, and can therefore find what is useless in what it constructs. Reason must direct hearts so that each piece of the imagined content, each particle of the "unreasonable," is used with proper order to produce the desired effect. This argument is the same as the one Flannery O'Connor employed when discussing reason as a brick in construction. The solid and not the useless is wanted to build a truly "edifying" work. The function of reason is to pur form, order, into the hazy contents supplied by the imagination.

Thirdly, both reason and feeling are needed in fiction because there

are many authorities who indicate that both are needed. Because of Flannery O'Connor's usual independence from tradition for its own sake, we can probably be sure that she did not put too much stress on this argument. Yet neither in theorizing nor in writing does Miss O'Connor actually ignore the past: "Malraux has pointed out that the artist is initially inspired as much by the work of his predecessors as he is by life. Though he builds on them, he is not interested in repeating again and again the successes of the past." 35

Saint Thomas recommends reason; he speaks of the authority of the past. And Miss O'Connor is happy to cite Saint Thomas in indicating that the artist has to use reason and the unreasonable. Other evidence of Miss O'Connor's use of authority in this context comes when she quotes Conrad's statement that the artist "'descends within himself; and in that region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the term of his appeal." 37 Flannery O'Connor explains this activity of descending into the "region of stress and strife" elsewhere:

I don't like the idea some people have that the novelist has this untouchable sensibility that ought to be left to its pleasure. What makes the

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84 For example, see above, p. 6 ff, where she rejects the automatic label of "Southern Novelist" as a cliche. Also see pp. 64-8 where Miss O'Connor rejects the "traditional kind of prettiness" in religion.


sensibility good is wrestling with what is higher than itself and outside it. It ought to be a good bone-crunching battle. The sensibility will come out of it marked forever but a winner. What ails a lot of people is that the writer’s so-called sensibility has had nothing to struggle with, no opposition. Conversely, in the case of some novels by Catholics, the writer’s belief has had nothing to struggle with. Just as bad a situation. 88

Conrad’s authority, she feels, calls on the artist to use both reason (belief) and feeling. Mere feeling needs government by something higher. Mere belief is “just as bad.” The writer needs both struggling together:

“There is a conflict and it is a conflict which we escape at our peril, one which cannot be settled beforehand by theory or fiat or faith. Too often we simply account it as settled before we start. We think that faith entitles us to avoid it, when in fact faith prompts us to begin it and to continue it until, like Jacob, we are marked irrevocably.” 89 Neither belief alone nor sentiment alone can satisfy. Flannery O’Connor cites Msgr. Romano Guardini as another authority who indicates that both reason and feeling are necessary: “For the writer of fiction, everything has its testing point in the eye, an organ which eventually involves the whole personality and as much of the world as can be got into it. Msgr. Romano Guardini has written that

88 O’Connor, “Flannery O’Connor, An Interview,” 34.

89 O’Connor, ”The Role of the Catholic Novelist,” 9.
the roots of the eye are in the heart." 90

Both this reference to Guardini and the explanation of Conrad's ideas lead to Flannery O'Connor's fourth reason for demanding that both reason and feeling be used in art. In both statements Miss O'Connor is implying a certain philosophic stand on the nature of humans and on the nature of art.

"In art the reason goes wherever the imagination goes," 91 The two should be inseparable. Likewise, sensibility is seen as good if it is wrestling with something higher than itself. The eye (reason) tests everything in fiction - and eventually this eye of reason involves the whole personality in its testing. Miss O'Connor sees feeling and reason together, with reason in charge. Feeling alone cannot produce anything true or valuable. It cannot produce real literature because it is a violation of the unity of the human personality. In what is perhaps the most fundamental statement in her philosophy of life and of art, Flannery O'Connor bases her argument ultimately on the unity of the human personality, on human nature: "You don't believe on one side of your head and feel on the other." 92

90 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.
92 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," 35. Because a reader or a writer does not feel and think on different sides of his head or different parts of a personality, because the writer and the reader are unified human beings experiencing as a conscious unity, thought and emotion should not be separated. This theory about the human personality, by the way, also explains why Miss O'Connor insists that the writer see the physical outside of an object he is trying to describe and then describe the internal characteristics that just make that object unique. It will not do for
This discussion has shown how the experience of the unity of the human personality demands logically both reason and emotion, and has helped make clear the basic premises of Flannery O’Connor’s philosophy of life and of art. Several important ways in which these premises flow to logical conclusions in Miss O’Connor’s thoughts and aesthetics must be postponed temporarily in order to draw a conclusion several problems raised earlier but not so far satisfactorily resolved. As a result of the discussion on how human personality unites reason and feeling, these problems can now be resolved. For perspective they will first be restated. The basic problem being investigated was whether Flannery O’Connor had a disjunction between belief and sensibility, and particularly whether she should have given more attention to decreasing the attractiveness of the evil and grotesque in her stories and to increasing the attractiveness of the good. This study was listing Miss O’Connor’s rebuttal of the charge that to increase the attractiveness of good she should

| the writer to ignore the external physical characteristics and it will not do for the writer to ignore the internal uniqueness of an object or action. See above, Chapter 1. |

93 For example, see pp. 142-145, for a discussion of how realism became popular as a result of this philosophy. Also see pp. 171, for the way this thinking makes Miss O’Connor favor the South as a topic. Actually, this notion is fundamental to so much of Miss O’Connor’s further thinking that precise citations to its additional use are fruitless.

94 Indeed this is the reason why that discussion was begun — as will be seen if the reader refers back to where it began, p. 76.
have shown a "purely affirmative" view of life (or an almost purely affirmative view, a view in which good is made almost irresistably attractive). Miss O'Connor not only rejected the "purely affirmative" view of life but also felt it was an erroneous exaggeration. A discussion of personality, reason, and feeling — in the thinking of Flannery O'Connor — can show how this view would be an exaggeration.

The purely affirmative view denies full value to reason, is a deviation from truth, and therefore distorts the value of emotion. It denies reason because it neglects man's limitations, his evil. Flannery O'Connor's full theory of man's limitations and evil will be developed later; for now it is sufficient to note that she can usually get rapid assent to man's being a limited creature by referring believers to the doctrine of Original Sin, by reminding readers of the way "even the saints" deflect from perfection, and by telling non-believers "I don't think anyone would object...at all" to the notion that the life of modern man is full of tendencies to evil. "I think all you would have to do is to read the newspapers to agree with me." A purely affirmative vision

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95 This full theory of man's limitations and therefore of his evil — Miss O'Connor uses the philosophical notion that evil is an absence of being — will be developed later when discussion of her philosophy resumes — see Chapter III. Also see below, pp. 90-91.


97 O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 11.
neglects "what man has done with the things of God." 98

The use of the grotesque is not the distortion. The purely affirmative vision is an exaggeration, "an excess, a distortion of sentiment, usually in the direction of an over-emphasis of innocence... We lost our innocence in the fall of our first parents, and our return to it is through the redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it. Sentimentality is a skipping of this process in its concrete reality and an early arrival at a mock state of innocence." 99 Moreover, when such a purely affirmative insistence on "mock innocence" is prevalent, when reason's government is abandoned and emotion rules, when this sentimentality "is overemphasized in the ordinary condition /i.e., given the limitations of an evil of men/," it "tends by some natural law to become its opposite" - the obscene. Thus another argument against the purely affirmative view is that it tends to create the obscene, something everyone (whatever his stand on the notion of man's evil or goodness) seems to agree is wrong. Basically, the purely affirmative vision is faulty because it violates the unity of the personality, the unity of reason and feeling; it proceeds "from the diseased... mind."

When emotion rules, man may tend to promote extreme innocence of the


99 ibid.
purely affirmative. But if reason is not governing, man may just as easily ignore the question of guilt and innocence. This is the "natural law" that converts the sentimentality of the purely affirmative vision to its opposite, obscenity. When emotion rules, man may seek an emotional satisfaction by looking for the pretty - this is the reason why Flannery O'Connor insists that the "traditional kind of prettiness" must be blended with something "a little more grotesque" in order to convey "a better idea of reality." When emotion rules, man may seek a different kind of emotional satisfaction, however; reason is not present to govern where and how emotional satisfaction should be obtained. "We live in an age...which is swept this way and that by momentary conviction," by the surge of emotion not grounded on the rock of reason. When emotion rules, man may seek emotional satisfaction in the obscene. "Pornography...is essentially sentimental, for it leaves out the connection of sex with its hard purposes, disconnects if from its meaning and life and makes it simply an experience for its own sake." Both the sentimental purely affirmative vision and its opposite, therefore, are strangely,


results of the same condition: neglect of due emphasis on man's limitations and therefore neglect of reason's governing\textsuperscript{103} - plus reliance on what is emotionally satisfying. When emotion rules, the sentimental or the obscene may just as easily result, although "the similarity between the two usually escapes" people.\textsuperscript{104}

The purely affirmative vision is faulty because it ignores reason in neglecting man's limitations; whether one accepts theological evil or looks at the actions of man in the newspaper (in daily experience), one must view man as limited. The purely affirmative vision also ignores reason in neglecting to see that reason's discipline is necessary for feelings both because of the unity of the human personality and because feelings if left ungoverned will urge indiscriminately towards the pretty, towards the obscene, or towards whatever pleases, and not necessarily towards perfection. Unity of the personality and proper government of human tendencies demand that a person use both reason and feeling. The purely affirmative view splits the human, produces disease. "Those who believe that art proceeds from a healthy, and not

\textsuperscript{103} This is why Flannery O'Connor describes reason as more important than feeling, even as she insists that both must go together: "what makes the sensibility good is wrestling with what is higher than itself" (O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, an Interview," 34) and the reasonable use of the unreasonable (O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 385)

\textsuperscript{104} O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer" 734.
from a diseased, faculty of the mind will take what he shows them as a revelation, not of what ought to be — not of the purely affirmative — "but of what we are at a given time and under given circumstances" — limited as man is in the world. The artist must not "be looked to for assurance." 105

Because it leads to the untruthful exaggeration of sentimentalism, therefore, the "purely affirmative vision" is something Flannery O'Connor must reject.

Miss O'Connor supplements and restates these ideas, and she applies to modern life, modern society, modern readers, and modern critics in general. The basic trouble is that the modern world has negated man's limitations, abandoned reason, and overly embraced feelings. "For the modern reader, moral distinctions are usually blurred in hazes of compassion"; today man's true goals "either don't exist at all for the general reader or are taken by him to be knowable by sensation." 106

As one symptom of this tendency at work Flannery O'Connor gives the usual homely example. "I once received a letter from an old lady in California who informed me that when the tired reader comes home at night he wishes to read something that will lift up his heart; and it seems her heart had not been lifted up by anything of mine she had read." This reader's "need, of course, is to be lifted up." It is interesting to note how her example uses an "old

lady" - already with connotations of excessive sentimentality. Flannery O'Connor does not deny that this need to be lifted up is a valid need. Her whole argument has been based on man's limitedness. This need is based on man's limitedness. This need is based on nature: "There is something in us, as story-tellers and as listeners to stories, that demands the redemptive act, that demands that what fails at least be offered the change to be restored. The reader of today looks for this motion, and rightly so." What Miss O'Connor finds as faulty with such a demand is what the modern readers "has forgotten the cost" of this redemptive motion of restoration. Miss O'Connor is returning to the same view and to the same terminology she had used earlier. The modern reader does not know the "cost" of the "bond-crunching battle" whereby "the sensibility" is made good by "wrestling with what is higher than itself," by being subordinated to the government of reason. The need to be lifted up is based on human nature, on "something in us...that demands," a redemption, on human limitations, on a "sense of evil...diluted or lacking." But one cannot satisfy these demands by violating the very human nature that commands the restorative act. One cannot abandon reason in the process of being lifted up to innocence, because what results then will be "mock innocence" or its opposite, the "mock damnation" of the obscene. 107

One might argue that only one "old lady in California" does not make a whole society, does not give us "the modern reader." In several ways, however, Flannery O'Connor would disagree and present counter-arguments.

"One old lady who wants her heart lifted up wouldn't be so bad, but you multiply her to two hundred and fifty thousand times and what you get is a book club." 108 The writer cannot say that he will ignore such readers because he must, as a matter of practicality, sell his work; moreover, the writer cannot hope to reach a select audience:

"I used to think it should be possible to write for some supposed elite, for the people who attend the universities and sometimes know how to read; but I have since found that though you may publish your stories in *Botteghe Oscure*, if they are any good at all, you are eventually going to get a letter from some old lady in California, or some inmate of the Federal Penitentiary or the state insane asylum or the local poor house telling you where you have failed to meet his needs." 109

For Flannery O'Connor this is an age of readers who "don't have the fundamental equipment to read in the first place." 110 The problem is with modern society: "You may say that the serious writer doesn't have to bother

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109 *Ibid.* For a further view of what Flannery O'Connor felt was to be the relationship between the writer and the reader see below, pp. 165-9.

about the tired reader; but he does, because they are all tired."

Other evidence that the urge to sentimentalism is a fault of modern culture comes when one examines the tendency of our age "to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God." Those with the purely affirmative vision are scandalized by the suffering of children: "The Aylmers whom Hawthorne saw as a menace have multiplied. Busy cutting down human imperfection, . . . Ivan Karamazov cannot believe as long as one child is in torment; Camus's hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ because of the massacre of the innocents."

In our age mere feeling, an excessive "gain in sensibility," popular pity," urges men to expect the perfect. Lacking the "blind, prophetically unsentimental eye of acceptance," our age tries to "govern by tenderness," It would be better if our age could accept the limits of man and of the material world -- instead of insisting on the purely affirmative. This tenderness or sentimentalism is erroneous because it is "cut off from the person of Christ."

The reader can be assured that Miss O'Connor's whole argument here does not rest on merely theological assumptions by observing that the context of this quotation, in the previous and especially in the following paragraphs of the text, looks at such human limitations as Mary Ann's grotesque cancer, physical limitation, and all men's obedience to death, as ontological limitations, as well as theological limitations of which Christ is the antidote. Further philosophical (as opposed to theological) argument proving the nature of evil and limitation in man comes as subsequent examination is made of Miss O'Connor's philosophy - see all of Chapter III, which discusses "Limitations" as an evil. Also see above, p.83.
and is thus unreal detached emotion, feeling without basis in a person existing in the everyday world, feeling therefore which is "wrapped in theory," mere feeling which is in effect mere reason. Just as tenderness detached from reason and unity of the personality generates what we have seen Flannery O'Connor elsewhere call "mock damnation" and the "obscene," so with the issue of the suffering of children:

When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is not respect for the suffering of men or children, but terror. It ends in forced labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber. \(^\text{112}\)

Flannery O'Connor's strongest and most lengthy argument that sentimentalism is a fault of modern culture is the least specific and the most paradoxical.

The phrasing of the argument can be better focused if one examines several direct statements of what Flannery O'Connor thought was wrong with modern society. For Flannery O'Connor, modern society was not a matter of tenor one hundred years. Thus in analyzing the philosophy of this society, she includes not only Life magazine, the "swamps of letters-to-the-editor," Philip Wylie, "the old lady in California," "articles I collect on the failure of the Catholic novelist," but also Mann, Miller, Hemingway, Hawthorne, Camis, and Dostoevsky. \(^\text{113}\) Miss O'Connor claims that "for the last few

\(^{112}\)O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35.

centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no...cause" for Redemption "in the actual life we live."114 This secularism holds that man is not limited and does not need Redemption or further perfecting. In consequence man's "sense of evil is diluted or lacking altogether."115 Miss O'Connor, for example, favored Old Tarwater in The Violent Bear It Away because he did not show "the outright secularism or the diluted Protestantism of the North." The wording here must be checked carefully.

Flannery O'Connor was not condemning Protestantism, for she had just said that she was "not interested in sects as sects" but in the "religious individual."116 Moreover, one must note the expression "outright secularism"; evidently "diluted Protestantism" is a secularism that is not quite so obvious. This statement is further clarified by Flannery O'Connor's condemnation of the "modern world" as divided between two false ideologies: "one part of it /the modern world/ trying to eliminate mystery, while another part tries to rediscover it in disciplines less personally demanding than religion."117

The second half of this quotation shows that Flannery O'Connor is not rejecting religion, much less "diluted religion." She is criticizing the process of dilution. She finds that some moderns are looking for something more emotionally comfortable than sharp discipline - the "sense of evil is diluted." Flannery O'Connor is criticizing how the reliance on mere feeling may be "less personally demanding" but it is not adequate because when man does not pay the "cost" of the "bone-crunching" government by reason, the resulting loss of the "sense of evil" shows as the sentimentalism already found to be a deficiency. So far there is nothing new in Miss O'Connor's statements except that she has applied them to society as a whole.

Other moderns, however, who support the first ideology of the two mentioned above, indulge in "outright secularism." With the "sense of evil...lacking altogether," they are "trying to eliminate mystery" or anything beyond the human limitations they do not recognize. These are the rationalists who are similar to the sentimentalists in that they also deny man's limitations. Here is where Flannery O'Connor's argument becomes paradoxical and difficult to follow. The rationalist with his over-reliance on mere reason would appear to be a very different kind of creature from the sentimentalist with his over-reliance on mere emotion, although both would be in error for violating the unity of the human personality, for separating

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reason and emotion in a denial of man's limitations. But the rationalist and sentimentalist are not opposite. This is the reason why Flannery O'Connor can summarize them both under the heading of secularism and distinguish them as outright secularism or diluted secularism. They are not opposites; they are similar because when they both separate reason and emotion they both accept the completeness of this world and reject human limitation.

A more important similarity resolves the paradox that causes the difficulty in this argument. The rationalist and the sentimentalist are similar because it is the over-reliance on mere emotion that leads the rationalist to his over-reliance on mere reason. In The Violent Bear It Away, Rayber, the rationalist who expects science to render man perfect and God useless, is thus led to deny man's limitations by observing his idiot son Bishop - a violent paradox indeed, that limitations of mind should lead to the denial of human limitations. Rayber's emotional attachment to Bishop is so excessive that it will not allow him to accept Bishop's retarded mind. This over-reliance on emotion causes him to reject God and His goodness; it causes Rayber to rely on science and reason - this world alone. Again, Flannery O'Connor explicitly stated that "one of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God."\(^{119}\) This paper has already

\(^{119}\) O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35. See the previous discussion of how the suffering of children stimulates modern atheists, pp. 88-91.
examined how such a view of children's suffering is an over-reliance on mere emotion. Yet it is this over-reliance on mere emotion that causes many, like Rayber, to deny human limitations, to feel that they are "done with" anything greater than themselves, and to embrace scientific rationalism.

Thus the rationalist and the sentimentalist are similar. Both accept nothing greater than the material world and are therefore collectively described as men with only a "secular belief"; both generate a sentimentalist literature. Both describe the situation of modern culture.

These conclusions are further verified by the implications of the whole essay "The Fiction Writer and His Country." In that essay, Flannery O'Connor begins by examining the statements of critics demanding overly affirmative literature. Neither editors of Life nor novelists and critics writing in reply to the editors, she feels, examine fully the basis of this demand. In two ways the demand is unacceptable because it is based on the faulty secularism described above.

First, the demand is unacceptable because it presumes that this world has no limitations. Those who make the demand claim that the overly affirmative literature is justified because it would reflect current society. In arguing for the overly affirmative literature these critics claim that "in the last ten years this country had enjoyed an unparalleled prosperity, that it had come nearer to producing a classless society than any other nation and that it
was the most powerful country in the world, but that our novelists were writing as if they lived in packing houses on the edge of the dump while they awaited admission to the poor house." Instead of this writing, such critics would demand "something that really represented this country," something that would "show the redeeming quality of spiritual purpose" and the "joy of life itself."

Miss O'Connor sees this demand as unjustified because if everything is really as good as claimed this "redeeming quality of spiritual purpose" is meaningless: "redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live." Thus Miss O'Connor's acceptance of redemption and of the way redemption implies a corrupt world needing redemption is in no way a cause of a disjunction between belief and sensibility. She feels she should not be condemned for showing a corrupt world needing redemption when her critics urge the need for a "redeeming quality of spiritual purpose." If everything is not as good as claimed, then the critics' demand to reflect modern perfection is meaningless because its very premise of modern perfection is destroyed. Flannery O'Connor, of course, believes that this demand is meaningless. It is unjustified because of the weakness of current society, described in the immediately preceding pages of this study. In short, would "these screams for joy... be quite so piercing if joy were really more abundant in our prosperous society."? 120

Thus, ignoring the limitations of the

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120 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 157-8, 162, 160. As regards this discussion of the world's limitations, see the earlier discussion of man's limitations, pp. 58-60.
material world leads to an impossible demand on the writer.

The second reason why this demand to show "the joy of life" is unacceptable meshes much more obviously with Miss O'Connor's previous criticism of modern society and its impossible demands on the writer. The modern secular culture ignores reason. Since it believes only in this world of matter, it evaluates by quantities, by "statistics": "we are asked to form our consciences in the light of statistics" because we do not "live in an age of settled belief." The secular culture ignores reason and the oneness of truth by demanding that one accept many truths, that truth is relative. The man who yields to this demand abandons reason because he contradicts himself: he tries "to establish the relative as absolute." He also caters to over-emotionalism. He adopts the relative in order to be "a little more palatable to the modern temper": he has catered to "convenience," to physical or psychological ease. He is a classic example of how modern secular culture separates reason and feeling. The man who yields to these demands denying reason is, according to Miss O'Connor's paradoxical argument examined above, caught up immediately in the opposite fault of over-rationalism: he patterns himself after the prevalent culture's scientism of Dr. Kinsey and Dr. Gallup. He believes reality is a set of facts that "can be determined by survey," by scientific quantifying which is the only remaining way of thinking about a world that has (for physical and psychological ease) been defined as entirely
Since he believes quantifying facts alone to be of value, such a person would not recognize that the "plainly grotesque" story of Mary Ann "belonged to fact and not to fancy." 122

Thus the artist who yields to these modern secularistic demands and believes that literature should merely reflect the way the world is finds himself in even worse straits. He has put himself out of a job: "The storyteller is concerned with what is; but if what is, is what can be determined by survey, then the disciples of Dr. Kinsey and Dr. Gallup are sufficient for the day thereof." 123 Statistical surveys replace the artistic writer. The artist who feels that his function is merely to reflect the current world and that "anybody who has the energy to do some research can give us a novel on . . . any needed subject - and can make it positive," - is following "the traditional procedure of the hack; and by some accident of God, such a novel might turn out to be a work of art - but the possibility is unlikely." Unfortunately "a lot of novels do get written in this way." 124 The theory that the artist is merely to reflect the world he sees is, therefore, another argument ultimately for the

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121 Ibid., 160-1.
123 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 161. Flannery O'Connor is not here denying that literature should do some reflecting of the way the world is, as the following quotations will show.
fact that reason is a prime ingredient of art. Reason's task is to use the unreasonable, to filter out and focus what is useless—as we have already seen. Although modern culture is founded on the faulty notion that man can reach reality by merely reflecting what is around him, modern writing would be faulty to accept that same notion that it can merely reflect. It must select. It must reject the useless. It must use reason to build a solid edifice. Otherwise, the artist is a hack grubbing along for the edifying facts at hand: the artist is a pollster or an advertising man; the artist is useless. This of course is a line of reasoning that not all men can accept. Writers and critics of writers should accept it, however, or content themselves with being without a function. The artist who feels that his function is merely to reflect the current world forgets that reason is a prime ingredient of art, that the "novelist does more than just show us how a man feels . . . he also makes a judgement on the value of that feeling." The artist who accepts the demands of secularism would logically be replaced by "the advertising agencies. They are entirely capable of showing us our unparalleled prosperity and our almost classless society, and no one has ever accused them of not being affirmative." Ultimately the reader demands affirmativeness is demanding a quick-sell job, not true human and humane art. "Where the artist is still trusted, he will not be looked to for assurance. Those who believe that art proceeds from a

125 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," 34. For further implications of the artist-as-pollster, see pp. 127-150.
healthy, and not from a diseased, faculty of mind will take what he shows them as a revelation, not of what we ought to be but of what we are. " Paradoxically then by not merely reflecting the material age that we are, the artist is more faithfully reflecting what we really are - he is then fulfilling the need to do more than merely reflect, and he is satisfying those who desire him to reflect.

That art must be a mere reflection of what exists is thus typical of the modern culture's demand that only facts, only the world of matter is important. But the modern culture contradicts itself by expecting the novelist also to show "the redeeming quality of spiritual purpose." Flannery O'Connor feels that for man in general and the artist in particular these demands of the modern secular culture are contradictory and unjustified. Moreover "any long-continued service" to these demands "will produce a soggy, formless, and sentimental literature, one that will provide a sense of spiritual purpose for those who connect the spirit with romanticism and the sense of joy for those who confuse that virtue with satisfaction."¹²⁶ - but a literature unacceptable to those who see the fallacy of modern culture's relativist sentimentalism. In its over-sentimentalism the modern culture confuses emotional "satisfaction" with virtue. It separates reason and feeling, denies man's limitations, and rests content with the world of matter. Sentimentalism is a fault generated by modern culture, a fault inescapable for the artist who submits to modern

Four examples illustrating the way modern society unjustifiably separates reasoned discipline from emotional convenience occur as parenthetic inserts in some of Flannery O'Connor's analyses. She examines modern education, the plight of the Negro, the cult of the "phone South," and the gaudiness of modern life. These examples are useful for interpreting specific passages in Miss O'Connor's stories. Since they do not expand her theories of literature or of life, however, they will not be discussed here. 127 Also, parenthetically, it was observed earlier how some critics found fault with Miss O'Connor for presenting characters whom they felt were overly grotesque and unlike the way society and life really are. Flannery O'Connor argued in return that she thought society grotesque and the readers in modern society unable to distinguish genuine from grotesque. The above discussion of Miss O'Connor's views on modern society shows how she was consistent: grotesque things that happen to many of her characters happen partly because these characters and their society are unacceptable to Miss O'Connor's philosophy.

There are two final pieces of evidence to support the notion that Flannery O'Connor attributed sentimentalism to modern culture.

The first of these concerns itself with the Catholic critic and writer.

127 These four examples are discussed in detail in Appendix A.
128 See the discussion of this material above, pp. 49ff.
Flannery O'Connor feels that the Catholic "is more liable than others to be smothered at the outset by theory, because of popular Catholic attitudes and because, since we \( \text{Catholics} \) know what we believe, we feel we should also know what we will write."\(^{129}\) "Popular Catholic attitudes" - again the fault is traced to modern society. Again, in examining the reasons why a Catholic critic or Catholic writer often clamors for the "purely affirmative vision" Miss O'Connor notes that this insistence "is foisted on him by the general atmosphere of Catholic piety in this country . . . . and even if this atmosphere cannot be held responsible for every talent killed along the way, it is at least general enough to give an air of credibility to Mr. Wylie's conception of what a belief in dogma does to the creative mind."\(^{130}\) Having seen Flannery O'Connor's indictment against modern society, one can evaluate the connection between the popular Catholic attitude and Mr. Wylie. The popular attitude expects a novel to mirror daily life and thus to reflect the purely affirmative vision: Mr. Wylie, as earlier discussions showed,\(^{131}\) held the seemingly opposite view that the Catholic novelist is to be disregarded because he automatically is going to insist on dogma and neglect reality. Miss O'Connor

\(^{129}\) O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 6. Flannery O'Connor uses the term "Catholic" in this quotation because at this point in her essay, her argument is with Catholic critics who demand the "purely affirmative vision." The context of the total essay, however, as well as the other occasions where Miss O'Connor's views on these matters appear, indicate that she applies this judgement to all cases of the "purely affirmative."

\(^{130}\) O'Connor, The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734.

\(^{131}\) See the discussion of this matter above, pp. 41-2 and p. 66.
finds that these purely affirmative Catholics claim Wylie to be prejudiced. They say they are not dogmatic, that they wish the writer to mirror the world. Yet these Catholics seem to insist that the writer mirror their a-priori view of a joyous, good world. Mr. Wylie's judgement is thus true - of the popular Catholic attitude. Catholic critics who encourage the "purely affirmative vision" are thus caught in an uncomfortable self-contradiction of unconsciously supporting the very dogmatism they claim to reject. They have so "matured" that they are "in danger of going off the other end." Flannery O'Connor rejects this servile dogmatism for Catholic writers:

Mauriac and Greene are criticized because in their novels they do not give a true picture of Christian marriage. This is typical of the kind of criticism the Catholic novelist is subjected to by Catholics. The Catholic reader is a good deal more sophisticated than he used to be; but in whatever fancy dress he disguises it, he still believes, I think, that the novelist is the handmaid of the Church and that is his excuse for existence.

Flannery O'Connor adds, in her typical narrative fashion, an anecdote that illustrates and reinforces her judgement:

I have come to think of this handmaid as being very like the porter who set Henry James's dressing case down in a puddle when James was leaving the hotel in Charleston. James was then obliged to sit in a crowded carriage with the satchel on his knees. All through the South the poor man was ignobly served, and he afterwards wrote that our domestic servants were the last people in the world who should be employed in the ways they were, for they were by nature unfitted for it.

The case of the Catholic novelist is the same: when he is given the function of domestic, the Church’s luggage is going to be set down in puddle after puddle.134

"By nature" as a man (who would not support what contradicts itself) and as an artist (who exists for his own legitimate ends), the novelist cannot afford to separate reason and feeling, to violate nature in over-rationalistically, and by the usual O'Connor paradox, over-sentimentally urging the purely affirmative vision.

Another way in which purely affirmative Catholic critics are vulnerable is that they contradict themselves theologically. Rhetorically including herself with such Catholic writers and critics, Miss O'Connor observes that "we judge before we experience and never trust our faith to be subjected to reality, because it is not strong enough."135 The purely affirmative Catholic critic does not trust that faith which he insists the writer should propagandize.

"Catholic readers are constantly being offended and scandalized by novels they don't have the fundamental equipment to read in the first place, and often these are works that are permeated with a Christian spirit."136 One element in that "fundamental equipment" is paradoxically a strong sense of their own faith.

These readers who demand the purely affirmative seem to be strong in faith;

134 Ibid., 9.
136 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 735. The other characteristic which Miss O'Connor finds necessary is training in how to read - a matter which is further explained by Miss O'Connor's remarks on the technique of writing, discussed later in this paper.
they demand that the writer show the same strong faith more patently. But actually "it is when the individual's faith is weak, not when it is strong, that he will be afraid of an honest fictional representation of life." If the writer is really secure in his faith, he will observe the interaction between his faith and the material world, "and his sense of mystery and his acceptance of it will be increased." The main mystery faced by the writer and reader with a secure faith is not hard to locate: "the Catholic writer, insofar as he has the mind of the Church, will feel life from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery; that it has for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."\(^{137}\) A strong faith does not preach or show merely the affirmative; it worships God's concern with a world of limitation. The writer with strong faith knows that "grace" . . . cuts with the sword Christ said he came to bring."\(^{138}\) The Catholic writer who insists on the "purely affirmative" contradicts himself theologically because he ignores revelation's message about how goodness is grotesque and upsetting, a cutting sword. Freaks are necessary to an author who really believes in Original Sin.\(^{139}\) Freaks are necessary to a writer who believes that there was anything to redeem, that the world was "worth dying for," that "redemption is meaningless unless there

\(^{137}\) O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733-735.


\(^{139}\) O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 381.
is a cause for it," in man's original nature as limited and in man's daily actions as evil.

The meaning of "strong faith" in this context suggests a thing connected with reason. The purely affirmative Catholic splits reason and feelings as he champions his "weak faith." The writer with a strong faith will look at grotesques because he understands well what his own theology demands.

Catholic critics are often prevented from accepting what theology suggests because of an emotional craving for the easy. "The best of them think: make it look desirable because it is desirable. And the rest of them think: make it look desirable so I won't look like a fool for holding it. In a really Christian culture of real believers this wouldn't come up." In the real Christian there is victory of reason over emotion, no "distortion of sentiment" whereby reason's steady view is swayed by either emotional craving for conformity with society (which is not a "really Christian culture") or by an "over emphasis on innocence" that skips the hard facts of perfection-through-labor and desires the emotionally satisfying perfection of the merely pretty, a view that "probably owes as much to romanticism as to piety." For the real Christian there will be this swaying from emotion; there will be strong faith in several

senses of the word. He will have a strong faith in the intellectual sense of something theologically well understood and not contradicted. He will have a strong faith in the action-producing sense of harmony between reason and feeling, a harmony that anchors emotional swaying with reasoned discipline. "To look at the worst will be for him no more than an act of trust in God."143

He will not ape modern society in seeking the pretty because it is emotionally gratifying and exciting; he will realize that "we have reduced the uses of reason terribly. You say a thing is reasonable, and people think you mean it's safe. What's reasonable is seldom safe, and always exciting."144 He does not need false detached emotionalism for excitement. The purely affirmative sway of modern society violates his theology and his unified personality.

By her position on theology here Miss O'Connor is not calling for the writer to disregard theology or to disregard a "universal responsibility for souls."145 No man can safely disregard concern with what he sees as the ultimate meaning of life.

A writer may agree that "to look at the worst will be . . . no more than an act of trust in God; but what is one thing for the writer may be another for the reader. What leads the writer to his salvation may lead the reader into

143 Ibid.
The writer is therefore faced with a dilemma: he must decide whether he should write portraying the evil he sees or whether he should attempt something more affirmative, whether he should write of the grotesque or try to purify the grotesques. Flannery O'Connor's advice is clear. As a person who cannot deny human nature's unity of reason and feeling without producing something actually more grotesque and less affirmative, as a writer who must obey fiction's first law of using reason on the unreasonable, as a Christian or Catholic (if the writer is, additionally, either of these), the writer must not try the impossibly sentimental purifying of the grotesque and thereby create something more grotesque - more grotesque because it was produced beyond the writer's control. Instead he should try to follow "Mauriac's advice: 'purify the source,'" view the real evil as God's mystery interacts with it. He must purify himself and attain a blend of reason and feeling that will not violate his nature, his vocation, and his theology. Even trying to "purify the source," he will find the dilemma difficult to resolve. But he cannot let himself be victimized by "a false conception of . . . the demands" of dogma. He must not avoid one grotesque by creating another worse one. He must find the delicate balance which will allow him to succeed. Otherwise, if he decides that the source seems pure but from it comes works that scandalize, - if he feels "that it is as sinful to scandalize the learned as the ignorant," he will either have to stop writing" or "prostitute the azaleas." He will not,
however, stoop to this second alternative of avoiding the evil-grotesque by portraying another sentimental-obscene grotesque, "unless it has been foisted on him by a sorry education or unless writing is not his vocation in the first place." 146

Still, even for the skilled writer of integrity there remains his concern for others:

The author must, of course, realize that it is his function, no less than it is the function of the Church, to protect the souls from dangerous literature. But in striving to live up to the legitimate requirements of his art, he will know that not all fiction will turn out to be suitable for everyone’s consumption. If in some instances the Church sees fit to forbid the faithful to read a work without permission, the Catholic author will be thankful that he has been recalled to a sense of responsibility. 147

Probably the simplest way to explain this statement - which seems at first to contradict Flannery O’Connor’s position about how the faith does not a-priori narrow or distort the field of vision - is to say that it is ultimately to be read as a statement of human fallibility. As with almost each of her arguments Flannery O’Connor admits that she may be in error, so too here: she is saying that any writer can err in the particular situation. Also, a key phrase is the one that calls on the artist to live up to art’s demands for harmony between reason and feeling - "to live up to the legitimate requirements of his art, he will know that not all fiction will turn out to be suitable for everyone’s

146 Ibid.; also, O’Connor, "The Partridge Festival," 82.
147 Ibid.
consumption." First of all one must be sure that it is the "legitimate" demands of art that are causing the artist his problem. Trifling demands can be set aside. In any event, the artist may err, or the religious authorities may simply warn against a book because it is too difficult for the normal reader or even the "learned" reader to grasp properly. The artist's job if he intends to keep writing is clear: to write what is true to himself, true to his function as an artist, and true to his theology - as best he can as a fallible human.

As a religious person the writer will do what he can when he can. As a writer, however, he must follow the nature and laws of writing. As a writer and as a religious person, the novelist must "look for the will of God first in the laws and limitations of his art and will hope that if he obeys those, other blessings will be added to his work." The purely affirmative critic or writer may feel that in his philosophy or in his religion he already does "possess the truth," that he can "use this truth directly as an instrument of judgement on any discipline at any time without regard for the nature of that discipline itself." 148 Those who demand the purely affirmative must realize, however, that they are demanding what is not art, that they are demanding something that violates the "nature of the discipline" which they think they are purifying. "The Christian writer" or critic "particularly will feel that whatever his initial gift is, it comes from God; and no matter how minor a gift it is, he

will not be willing to destroy it by trying to use it outside its proper limits." The purely affirmative people are especially foolish, for they are denying their beliefs as well as the purified art they claim to be aiding. They want writing that will cause men to take their obligations to God more seriously, yet they are causing the artist to violate his obligations to God when they demand writing that violates the nature of art. Purely affirmative literature, therefore, is to be rejected because it violates the nature of art and thereby sins against the will of God, the Author of essences. To show exactly how and why it violates the nature of art must be the task of later and more specific chapters of this present investigation, when attention is given to Miss O'Connor's demands for good writing.

Finally, it is curious - and helpful for interpreting the previous ideas - to see how this problem of harmonizing theology with writing was handled in one specific case, the case of Flannery O'Connor herself.

Some young writers ask themselves so many questions before they begin to write that they never begin. They concern themselves with problems that will never confront their particular imaginations. When I first began to write, I took over all the problems of Francois Mauriac and impeded my progress for several months worrying about the souls my sensual works were going to send to hell. My sensual works, of course, did not exist, and were not destined to. My problems were entirely different, and I could have discovered them earlier had I spent some time grappling with my own and not Mauriac's imagination. 150

Basically, therefore, in this dilemma the writer must think things through as best he can. He must try to be honest. If his vocation is to write, he must continue to write. He must not avoid one kind of grotesque to fall into another kind of grotesque. Yet he must realize this fallibility and ultimately, as with all human acts, judge in the light of his own conscience.

The only conscience I have to examine in this matter is my own, and when I look at stories I have written I find that they are, for the most part, about people who are poor, who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little - or at best a distorted - sense of spiritual purpose, and whose actions do not apparently give the reader a great assurance of the joy of life.\textsuperscript{151}

He must not, in his scrupulosity, forget his human "responsibility for souls," his responsibility to others. But he must not forget that his responsibility ultimately calls for integrity, not for sentimentally "pious trash." As with anything human, "the young person beginning to write today, and particularly the young Catholic, has to ask his own questions and find his own answers."\textsuperscript{152}

Typical of Flannery O'Connor's paradoxical approach to the problem, moreover, is the word "piety." She has just suggested that this purely affirmative vision, when it occurs in a Catholic writer or critic "probably owes as much to romanticism as to piety."\textsuperscript{153} As has been shown earlier,\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{151}O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 161.
\textsuperscript{153}O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734.
\textsuperscript{154}See above where this matter is discussed, pp. 98-102.
romanticism is Miss O'Connor's word for the position of those who insist on mere emotion without reason and who therefore think of the writer as one who works by emotional inspiration rather than by reason's discipline. By the word "piety" therefore, Miss O'Connor suggests that these purely affirmative Catholics have gone the way of all who stress reason excessively and have developed their expected excessive emotionalism.

Final evidence that Flannery O'Connor attributed the sentimental separation of reason and feeling to modern culture comes from the analysis of Miss O'Connor's stories as this analysis is presented by Sr. Gable. This analysis has almost the weight of an explanation by Flannery O'Connor herself, since Miss O'Connor endorsed it so heavily by saying, "I shall learn from it myself and save myself and my breath by referring other people to it." In her analysis Sr. Gable stated four areas in which Miss O'Connor shows modern society as attempting false approaches to life: rationalism, humanism, psychology, and the quantifying urge. Three of these four are basically the same. The rationalist claims that reason, reason organised in science, can alone put him on the path to success. Rationalists who claim they have no illusions really have the most illusions because they trust reason and science to the exclusion of anything else, especially to the exclusion

Psychologists and sociologists especially are an example of the most misguided type of rationalist scientist. The psychologist and sociologist think that reason alone is needed, but in addition they have the trouble that they do not even use reason. They think that pinning labels on to experience explains experience. For Flannery O'Connor this is merely the already faulty scientific method gone berserk. Labels merely facilitate organization of reason; they do not explain anything, much less do they suffice as an explanation. The quantifier is another type of misguided rationalist scientist. He thinks he can discover truth by counting the most answers on questionnaires, I.Q. tests, etc. Rayber in The Violent Bear It Away and Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First" illustrate this weakness. Those who quantify and fall into this weakness attempt to use reason alone and its scientific method, but again end up with a travesty of the scientific method. They attempt to use the scientific procedure of analyzing variations in the world of matter to

156 Sr. Mariella Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictan Review, XV (1964), 132. One need not, however, accept Flannery O'Connor's and Sister Gable's theology in order to agree with this position. The important thing is that the rationalist believes in nothing other than his reason and the organization of his reason into science. The Christian should find fault with the rationalist because the rationalist does not accept any other knowledge - as that obtained by revelation. The non-Christian can still see fault in the rationalist by observing the psychologist and the quantifier, whom Sister Gable offers as Miss O'Connor's specific type of rationalist. Even the critics who do not accept the theological position that the rationalist should have gone beyond reason to accept revelation can at least agree that the rationalist should have recognized man's finiteness and should have gone beyond reason - proof that even a person who disagrees with Miss O'Connor's theology should come to this conclusion is shown in the examination of the psychologist and the quantifier.
determine persisting truth by observing what remains constant in all these variations. The quantified survey, they feel, reaches truth by finding what remains constant. But while truth remains constant, it is not proper to say that everything that seems to remain constant is truth. These quantifiers have upgraded their scientific method for getting clues to some truth and given it the exalted position of being the only method for obtaining all truths. Again, therefore, under the guise of accepting reason alone they reject even reason for the method of determining the organization of reason. Moreover, Flannery O'Connor would not accept quantifiers' reliance on reason alone anyway. These quantifiers are those whom Miss O'Connor had rejected explicitly because in their attempt to use reason alone they abandoned reason: truth is whatever the survey shows - they therefore "establish the relative as absolute" and form "consciences in the light of statistics." As we have seen, such a position is for Flannery O'Connor hostile to the very reason it claims to champion; moreover, by its thirst for what gives ease it stems from and leads to the excessive-emotionalism of which it seems to be the opposite, and it denies that the material world or man has any limits. All these characters - the rationalist as made more specific in the psychologist and the quantifiers - are examples of persons who place excessive reliance on mere reason. Opposed to them is the group which Sr. Gable calls the "humanists," defined with the wording of Wise Blood, as "professional do-gooders [who] are
hollow-tin-Jesuses." Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First" is another example. The trouble with these "humanists" is that they use emotion excessively. In the words of Thomas, the sentimental rationalist, describing himself more than his mother in "The Comforts of Home," they pursue "goodness with such mindless \( \text{i.e., they ignore reason} \) intensity" that they ignore reason for the illusion of goodness. In the psychologizing rationalistic quantifier and in the mindless, over-emotional humanist we thus again see Flannery O'Connor's indictment of modern culture as improperly separating reason from feeling.

For Flannery O'Connor modern society and culture, therefore, provide additional proofs and examples of the fact that the purely affirmative vision is not satisfactory. Modern society and culture are both a cause and a result of the desire for the purely affirmative. Miss O'Connor reaches these conclusions by examining her own experience with readers who illustrate the separation of reason and feeling. She notes that if one accumulates enough such readers one has a culture, society. Miss O'Connor also reaches these conclusions

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by examining the way modern culture expresses itself about the suffering of children and by examining the modern tendency to rest content with the materialistic view of reality - a view that shows society as composed of outright secularism of those who judge actions by feelings alone. These rationalists and emotionalists ultimately are the same person. Their separation of reason and feeling is an offense against the reason they champion because this separation eventually exalts the relative as absolute and promotes truth by survey, the pleasing emotional truth of what gives ease by allowing one to float along with the consensus. Their separation of reason and feeling is an offense against feeling because one with a sense of taste discovers that they produce sentimental literature. Their separation of reason and feeling is an offense especially against the creative artist because it reduces him to uselessness. Flannery O'Connor reaches these conclusions again, by noting how Catholic proponents of the purely affirmative vision are the victims of this separation of reason from feeling, and are therefore unwillingly contradicting themselves. Finally Miss O'Connor reaches her conclusion by observing how Sr. Gable has been able to see this indictment of modern culture at work in Flannery O'Connor's own stories.

At some length we have been tracing Miss O'Connor's most important response to the view that the artist must have a purely affirmative vision.
One reason why Miss O'Connor rejects this excessive insistence on the purely affirmative is that this view leads to an erroneous exaggeration. It violates the unity of the human personality by separating reason and feeling. This separation appears in literature as the distasteful exaggeration of the sentimental and obscene. This separation appears in and stems from a separation of modern culture: the secularism of modern society's rationalism and sentimentalism—paradoxically equivalent abuses—is the same separation of reason from feeling because it is led by a desire for the convenient (emotions) to deny what reason should show as man's limitations. The purely affirmative vision is, therefore, unacceptable. It is not Flannery O'Connor who has suffered the "much discussed disjunction between sensibility and belief"; but rather it is the critics and modern culture itself whose separation between reason and feeling does not allow them to accept the "normal" person such as Miss O'Connor.

If Miss O'Connor's own stories are, as she claims, realistically affirmative and appear grotesque or insufficiently optimistic because society is at fault, and if the demand for greater affirmativeness can be traced to a "diseased faculty of mind" in the individual and ultimately in society—then Flannery O'Connor's use of the apparently grotesque is not a fault but a virtue present by her conscious choice.
When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock— to the hard of hearing you shout, and the almost blind draw large and startling figures.\textsuperscript{159}

I write about grotesque people because I write about them best. It is my vocation to write about them best. It is my vocation to write about Redemption, and when one sees life from that viewpoint, one sees so many distortions in today’s world that are accepted as normal and natural. To people who so accept distortions (as natural and normal) you have to exaggerate your point.\textsuperscript{160}

Thus, Flannery O’Connor feels that her stories of apparent grotesques are “literal and not naturalistic.” They are “literal in the same sense that a child’s drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn’t try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion. I am interested in the line that creates spiritual motion.”\textsuperscript{161} To an audience that is used to its own diseased mind as normal, the author’s “problem will be to make these grotesques appear as distortions to an audience.”\textsuperscript{162} One is reminded of the “large and startling” figure Flannery O’Connor drew of herself in the famous self portrait. The deliberate grotesque in writing can be a way of waking the inert or hostile reader to the

\textsuperscript{159}O’Connor, “The Fiction Writer and His Country,” 162-163.


\textsuperscript{161}O’Connor, Letter to Ihab Hassan, 79.

\textsuperscript{162}O’Connor, “The Fiction Writer and His Country,” 163.
grotesque in himself and in his society. Miss O'Connor did not view these grotesques as really grotesque because "this isn't a distortion or an exaggeration that destroys." Flannery O'Connor's "distortion is an instrument . . .; exaggeration has a purpose." 163 Men are grotesque in her stories, but "their fanaticism is a reproach not simply an eccentricity. Those who, like Amos or Jeremiah, embrace a neglected truth will be seen to be the most grotesque of all." 164 In a letter to James Farnham, Miss O'Connor confirmed that one reason why the grotesque must be used is that today's society can be reached only in the negative way of writing of Redemption: she can truly redeem, uplift, and affirm man not by the purely affirmative method but only by showing the ugliness of evil from which man is redeemed. 165

Today is an unbalanced age, a culture in which reason and feeling are not properly poised in the psyche. A society asks why novelists cannot reflect what society blindly thinks to be its own well being and perfection.

"Those writers who speak for and with their times are able to do so with a great deal more ease and grace than those who speak counter to prevailing

163 On one occasion mentioned earlier, Miss O'Connor did jokingly deny her grotesqueness - see above, p. 6. However, this is just a rhetorical denial made tongue-in-cheek to emphasize another more serious point - that she is not portraying deviation, but distortion with a purpose. See the discussion of Miss O'Connor's typical trick of theorizing in paradoxes, pp. 6-10.


attitudes." The writer may give just that balanced picture, but a society that is unconsciously unbalanced will feel such writing to be grotesque and not what it has requested. Some kinds of balance will be shown in a later chapter to be unvirtuous. But balance between reason and feeling must be retained by the writer; balance is to be retained simply by the sane human being. It is that balance for all men that, Flannery O'Connor suggests, the balanced writer can give the reader by the apparent grotesque, by the shock of "awe and terror" of an object or act that is startling. Miss O'Connor indicates this balance concomitant with awe when she writes of the grotesque peacock who does not yet have his tail: "I have been looking at them /peacocks/... and always with the same awe as on that first occasion; though I have always, I feel, been able to keep a balanced view and an impartial attitude." Although this dedication with peacocks is for Miss O'Connor "a passion, a quest," she has kept a balance, a reason controlling passion impartially. Although further research will show that balance is not sufficient, such balance is a good thing and an essential: thus Miss O'Connor felt that an ideal relationship was the partnership between the vigorous enthusiasm of Mother Alphonsa, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, "a woman of great force and energy," and Alice Huber, "whose sturdy and patient qualities complemented" Mother Alphonsa's "own

forceful exhuberant ones. With their concerted effort, the grueling work prospered." They founded a productive order of nuns to take care of incurable cancer. Emotion's zest and reason's discipline are needed. 168

Another reason why Miss O'Connor used the grotesque is that even if it were not needed to waken modern society, even if it were not actually the affirmative as improperly seen by the crooked vision of modern society, even if it were the good directly portrayed, the good is itself grotesque. When Miss O'Connor first realized this notion, she felt it "opened up for me also a new perspective on the grotesque. Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflections with which we do not argue, but good is another matter." The grotesque may exist, that is, as a reflection of the grotesqueness of the person and of his society. The grotesque is more than just a reflection, however. "Few have stared at that the good long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliche or a smoothing down that will soften their real look." 169 It is not that good in itself is grotesque. Good is grotesque because of human limitations; in men it is always found "under construction" made

imperfect by some "smoothing down" process. Purely affirmative literature is impossible because a purely affirmative world does not exist - and in fact, short of God Himself, the purely affirmative does not exist and is not true.

The discussion of any possible "disjunction between sensibility and belief" is now complete. It is this possible disjunction which began the lengthy examination just concluded. In brief, the argument runs as follows.

Flannery O'Connor says that the first task of the artist is to see what is -- externally and internally. She says that she as an orthodox Christian sees from the standpoint of the Redemption and that Redemption is meaningless unless there is a cause for this in the condition of man. Critics argue that Miss O'Connor thereby suffers the disjunction between sensibility and belief. Some critics argue that Miss O'Connor has allowed her theology to corrupt her view of the condition of man, that what Flannery O'Connor is going to say about man's condition will be predetermined by her belief that man is redeemed and that his condition therefore must have been such to demand Redemption. Miss O'Connor replies that Christian dogma does not limit a writer or distract his view of man's real condition. She replies that she may subconsciously be a victim of allowing dogma to dictate her view, but she consciously feels that she is not guilty. Readers who insist a-priori that it must dictate her views are guilty of the very a-priori dogmatism of which they accuse her. Such propaganda, moreover, would be not worth her efforts if it would so discolor
reality that it would offend non-believers and drive them away rather than attract them. Mainly, however, Flannery O'Connell argues that belief in dogma does not stop or detract or distort a writer's vision of the condition of man; it adds to what he sees. Even if he is going to reject that "extra" vision of the writer, the critic cannot complain as long as the natural vision is acceptable and true.

A second group of critics argues that Flannery O'Connell suffers the disjunction between belief and sensibility because her sensibility is so bent towards the grotesque that proper belief, an affirmative philosophy, is lacking in her work. Some of these critics argue that Miss O'Connell had a subconscious attraction for evil; she was a natural pessimist. Flannery O'Connell replies that the writer must follow his "vocation": he must write about whatever he finds he can write about effectively. She can write the sort of thing that she does produce - whether it is to be labelled grotesque or not. She admits that perhaps she is subconsciously pessimistic, but she states that she deliberately uses the apparently grotesque. It is, at least, not present subconsciously, but consciously - and not because of her personality or Southern environment. She continues her rebuttal by pointing out that those who criticize her grotesques often seem to be seeking a "purely affirmative" literature. Such a purely affirmative vision is faulty because it ignores man's human natural limitations, because it merely repeats the clichés of
"traditional piety" for tradition's sake, and because it leads to what intuitive good taste recognizes as "pious trash." The purely affirmative vision is faulty because it is produced by a disjunction between reason and feeling (the very charge of which she is accused) that violates the nature of man and of art - a disjunction that characterizes and is produced by modern secular society, a disjunction that produces the exaggerations that are the definition of sentimental poor writing. Finally, the purely affirmative vision is faulty because it will not arouse modern society from its own grotesqueness, because it demands a reflection of society's vigor and forgets that a true reflection must show modern society as lacking that vigor and as possessed of a "diseased" personality, because it forgets that in humans, even the good is grotesque since it is "under construction," and because it demands that the artist violate the nature of art. Basically, therefore, Flannery O'Connor accuses her critics of the very "disjunction between belief and sensibility" of which they accuse her.

In order to follow Miss O'Connor's line of reasoning as she refutes the above charges, it was necessary to investigate deeply a few matters of importance as premises of Miss O'Connor's positive philosophy of life and literature. That is, in order to follow Miss O'Connor's negative thinking about what she was not doing, it was necessary to observe at times the basic elements of her positive thinking. Now that these refutations have been examined and now that the ensuing premises of Miss O'Connor's thought have been examined, the present discussion can move on to matters more rewarding to the literary critic. Earlier discussion observed that belief in the nature of man as a unified personality was basic to Flannery O'Connor's thinking and that
respect for human nature and the integrity of the human personality demands that the thinker not separate reason from feeling in man - either in the life of man or in the art he produces. Both reason and feeling, with reason governing, are basic to life and art. This principle will be developed in several ways in the following analyses. Moreover, this discussion has observed Flannery O'Connor's notion that the weakness of modern society is that it is both an aggregated result of and an environmental cause of this faulty separation within the personality of the individual. This notion is important because of how it explained many of the characters and much of the society portrayed in Flannery O'Connor's fiction.

Now that the negative arguments about what Flannery O'Connor was not doing have been examined, and now that the basic premises of her thought have been examined, the present investigation will move on to examine her positive arguments about what she was doing.
BEYOND REASON AND EMOTION: THE PROPHET'S VIEW OF LIMITATION AND LOVE

Previous analysis has shown the basic premises of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy of life and art. Her thinking about what are proper acts for man and in particular for the writer is based on human nature. What human nature allows and what human nature indicates will produce most effective use of man's abilities are the best acts for man and for the writer. Flannery O'Connor's most basic perception about human nature is that consciousness - as well as taste, tradition, logic, theology, etc. - posits the human personality as a unity. This unity demands that man's prime faculties, reason and feeling, operate together in a man of integrity. The artist too is subject to these considerations - at least as a human being. Whether and how the nature of art subjects the artist as an artist to these same theories has not yet been made clear; moreover, what consequences these theories have for the artist or in general for the human being have not yet been made clear. This chapter will move beyond Miss O'Connor's replies to criticism and will examine her positive thinking and make clear further ramifications of her thought about the nature of life and art.

In an age of sentiment, of over-emphasized emotion, we have
seen, Miss O'Connor recommends reason. The first problem is to see where that use of reason is to lead: "Remember that reason should always go where the imagination goes. The artist uses his imagination to discover an answering reason in everything he sees. For him, to be reasonable is to find in the object, in the situation, in the sequence, the spirit which makes it itself."¹ That is, in fact, why the artist's second rule, enunciated at the start of this study, is to see not only the external of what he is looking at but also the internal uniqueness of a thing. The artist first sees the externals; secondly he must see past the externals to the internal qualities that make an object, situation, or sequence uniquely itself. He must see past the externals to the internals because he must use reason, and reason functions by looking for essence. "You must learn to look for whatever is in each person and each thing that make it itself. Hopkins called this 'inscape.'"² Knowing this essence of external objects and situations, however, includes knowing the essence of one's self: "when we talk about the writer's country we are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside. ...The writer's value is lost, both to himself and to his country, as soon as he ceases to see that country as part of


himself."  

3 Oneself is, of course, part of the world to be observed. The artist's value is lost if he does not know himself because his own essence is the most notable part of that world whose essence he is to use reason to know. To avoid knowing oneself is to avoid knowing the world, to neglect reason.

A cardinal principle of Flanner O'Connor's thought now rises for consideration. "To know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks."  

To get to "The heart of the matter," the "reality of the thing," one must take the pretty and the grotesque, the good and the evil.  

The cardinal principle of the limitations of man and the limitations of the world is what emerges when one looks at the essential uniqueness of things. For Flannery O'Connor the question of limitations can be examined in many different ways. It is defined and proved in many different ways. Limitation is finitesness. Limitation is, in the Scholastic sense, lack of being — evil, ontologically and/or morally. Limitedness and therefore evil is the most important characteristic revealed as the unique essence of oneself and of this world of matter. "To declare a limitation" is "like all limitations" the "gateway to reality."  

Miss O'Connor frequently returns to the problems of limita-

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4 Ibid.
tions and evils of this world and of the South; she attempts to prove her point and to explain her thinking in the following ways.

Uniqueness itself is a limitation. As soon as a person admits to an intuition or consciousness of the fact that he constitutes a separate, distinct, unique being, he is saying that there are limits beyond which his personality does not extend, limits to the qualities he possesses. His uniqueness can be identified because these qualities which he possesses and which someone or something else does not possess can be identified. Uniqueness of the individual or of a region implies limitation. An intuition or consciousness of human limitation, physical and moral, is something Flannery O'Connor credits to men in general. Although she never explicitly states her logic quite so Scholastically, she must be arguing that since a consciousness of human limitation is so widespread as to be almost universal it must be based on a fundamental of human nature. Such a consciousness of limitation would not be so widespread if its consistency were not derived from nature itself.

Her wording illustrating this line of thought is as follows. "Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflec-

7Ibid., 32.
tions with which we do not argue."\(^8\) Most humans seem to accept
the fact that "we're all grotesque."\(^9\) As we have seen, many people
may admit to a sense of evil for the wrong reasons; they may seem
to justify their sense of evil by drawing on sentimental excessive
emotionalism. But most people would agree that human life produces
"strange shadows"; "I don't think anyone" - at least not "most of
us" - "would object" to acknowledging these "strange shadows."
"I think all you would have to do is read the newspapers to agree
with me."\(^10\)

Psychological and moral evils are not the only limitations
consciousness makes present to us. Flannery O'Connor can reach
for a very intimate example from her own experience as a writer.
The novelist may aim at an ideal: "This is the condition we aim
for; but it is one which is seldom achieved in this life, partic-
ularly by novelists. The Lord doesn't speak to the novelist as
He did to His servant Moses, mouth to mouth. He speaks to him as
He did to those two complainers, Aaron and Aaron's sister Mary:
through dreams and visions, and fits and starts, and by all the
lesser and limited ways of the imagination.\(^11\) Daily experience

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\(^8\) O'Connor, "Mary Ann, 35.


\(^11\) See the last chapter, where this discussion was introduced but
left unconcluded until the present, - pp. 83-5.

as a writer showed Miss O'Conner that the ideal for which she aims is attained only "in fits and starts," in "limited ways." The way man's performance falls short of his desires is proof of man's limitations.

Especially the Southerner "seldom underestimates his own capacity for evil" because Southerners "have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence - as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of our country." The South derives its "inburnt knowledge of human limitation," its intuitive consciousness of human finiteness, partly from the fact that "we lost the War." From its involvement in the experience of failure, the South passes on a sense of human limitation as part of its cultural consciousness. From her own observation of and involvement in the experience of "people who are poor, who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little - or at best a distorted - sense of spiritual purpose, and whose actions do not apparently give the reader a great assurance of the joy of life," Miss O'Conner and many like her conclude that human wretchedness is

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13 O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 35
"credible" from such observation of and involvement in the experience of falling short of Ideal Truth.¹⁵ Many men admit to the fact of human limitations. They do not require further logical proof, but accept human limitation as a fact of experience. Because so many accept the notion of human limitations, a person has greater assurance of his own consciousness of evil. This method of arguing to the existence of human limitation will, of course, not be convincing to everyone: some will claim that faulty observation has been made, that failure is not a fact of experience. Others will claim that the consciousness of failure is not wide-spread enough or that nothing about human nature is proved by the fact that such a sense of limitation is wide-spread. For such people other arguments about the existence of limitation must be used.

There is another argument that will not be acceptable to all men, but will still have force for those whose Christianity is not a dead facade. This is the theological argument, the argument from revelation to the fact of Original and human sin, the argument that if Redemption is the central fact of Christianity, man must have been evil enough to need redeeming. This apparently inborn limitation, this human inability to persevere in the ideal, Flannery O'Connor takes to be the "effects of Original Sin."¹⁶ One way of

¹⁵Flannery O'Connor's opinion that many of the advocates of modern society thereby contradict themselves has been shown previously in this study and will be observed again later. It is a notion that Miss O'Connor frequently implies and it must therefore frequently be observed in this study.

looking at the problem of human limitation is to admit, because of one's theological presupposition, that limitation is the result of the loss of "innocence in the fall of our first parents." 17 "The writer with Christian convictions" will consider his "true country and his true topic to be "what is eternal and absolute" beyond the meager limitations of this material world. 18 Orthodox theology leads to an implicit acceptance of a created universe "with all that implies of human limitations and human obligations to an all-powerful Creator." 19 Orthodox theology leads to a recognition of human imperfection. It is interesting to note that Flannery O'Connor --- very obviously in this last quotation and implicitly in the context of the other "theological" quotations --- never narrowly argues that man's only limitation is moral evil. Her theology requires her logically to acknowledge moral evil, a deviation from "human obligations to an all-powerful Creator." But even her theology causes her to acknowledge moral limitation as only one aspect of general "human limitations." It is very important to note that moral evil is seen as merely an aspect of general human limitations because one then has explicit evidence for arguing that Flannery O'Connor uses the terms "limitation" and "evil"

interchangeably, that Miss O'Connor is using the Scholastic notion of evil as deprivation of being - ontological or moral.

That humans and indeed the whole universe are limited, therefore, is a truth Flannery O'Connor can prove by arguing from orthodox theology. Again, however, Miss O'Connor recognizes that for those who do not accept Christianity or whose Christianity is a dead shell, this is a "warped vision for the hostile audience"; she realizes that for these people other arguments are necessary. She realizes that an argument based on theological data will not convince and that she needs an argument (and a type of fiction) that can "stand on its own feet and be complete and selfsufficient and be impregnable in its own right," an argument that is based on reason and nature.

Flannery O'Connor's most obvious and sturdy philosophical proofs of the limits of man and of this world are supplied by a classic argument: the observation of change. Man is limited because he must ultimately face death, at least a temporal end to his present being. Thus, for Miss O'Connor "death has always been a brother to my imagination. I can't imagine a story that doesn't properly end in it or in its foreshadowings." Critics have complained that Flannery O'Connor uses death too frequently. Hyman

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20 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733-4
complained that the major weakness in Miss O'Connor's stories is that they "came to rely too often and too mechanically on death to end them."22 Miss O'Connor uses death, however, not as a quick resolution to a plot but as a symbol of any human limitation. She made clear that this is her view of death when she explains what she means by the statement that she cannot "imagine a story that does not properly end in it death or in its foreshadowings."23 The very statement which Hyman uses as evidence against Miss O'Connor. She makes her symbolism clear when she equates death and its "foreshadowings" with any physical defect and then equates physical defects with all human limitation. Death and its foreshadowings include any example of human imperfection, human limitation; death and its foreshadowings include physical limitations and evils such as Mary Ann's cancer and the evils "which the sisters of Rose Hawthorn's order spend their lives caring for."24 Death and its foreshadowings include human suffering, especially the suffering of innocent children which is recognized as evil by

those who deny any power greater than this world. Miss O'Connor equates these physical defects, symbols of death, "foreshadowings" of death, with any human limitation when she cites the following passage from Hawthorne to approve the way Hawthorne made use of the same equation.

"Georgiana," said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek may be removed?"

"No, indeed," said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. "To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"Ah, upon another face it might," replied her husband; "but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest defect, which we hesitate to term whether a defect or beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection."

Death is more than a physical limit. A physical "defect" or lack of beauty (a grotesquerie) is something that did not come "perfect" from the "hand of Nature"; it is a visible mark of earthly

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25Ibid. The reader should also consult the earlier time where this study observed the paradox that it is this very limitation which causes Hawthorne's Aylmer, Iwan Karamazov, and Camus' hero, etc., to deny that there is any power greater than that of this world, pp. 89-90. Recognition of limitation leads to a paradoxical denial of limitation - because of the paradox of distorted reason and sentiment examined earlier in this study. Of course the reader should note that Aylmer, Karamazov, etc., do not really recognize their limitations; they merely talk about them, but do not really believe that they are limited. Flannery O'Connor would have a character actually recognize limitation with the intellect and believe in human limitation with his whole person.

26Ibid., 30, 35, 32.
imperfection." Death and its foreshadowings are any human limitation. Miss O'Connor makes this death symbolism explicitly clear as she uses the Hawthorne story to represent the meaning of Mary Ann's death - when she reviews what the story of Mary Ann meant for her: Mary Ann "stands not only for herself but for all other examples of human imperfection and grotesquerie." Death and its foreshadowings, human suffering, human limitations, exist. Mary Ann's suffering and death is not a tragedy but a symbol for all human imperfection, "which the sisters of Rose Hawthorn's order spend their lives caring for." The central fact to be learned from Mary Ann and what she symbolizes for Flannery O'Connor is that Mary Ann derived from the nuns founded by Hawthorn's daughter a "wisdom that taught her what to make of her death," her human limitations. Even the Aylmers and those who use the suffering of the innocent "to discredit" the existence of anything beyond human power, those who are busy cutting down human imperfection - even they usually contradict themselves and are stunned by an intuition of limitation when their feelings rebel against physical defects and suffering. The Aylmers, Ivan Karamazov, Rayber in Miss O'Connor's own book The Violent Bear It Away are all examples of people committed to this rebellion. In fact Miss O'Connor notes that death is the theme of much modern literature. There is Death in Venice, Death of a Salesman, Death in the Afternoon, Death of a Man, "Mary Ann's was the death of a child. It was simpler than any of these, yet infinitely more knowing . . . Hers
an education for death." This symbolic living-death explains why, for Flannery O'Connor, Mary Ann "stands not only for herself but for all other examples of human imperfection and grotesquerie." Death is, moreover, more than an argument or symbol against materialism. Flannery O'Connor recognizes that many who deny human limitation have discovered this flaw in their logic: they have discovered that they are contradicting themselves when they deny human limitations yet allow themselves to see suffering as a limitation which shocks. These believers in the sufficiency of the present world may deny that suffering is a limit: thus the "logical outcome" of their belief in the sufficiency of this world is "forced labor camps and the fumes of the gas chamber." 27 Those who want to be logical in their denial of human limitations cannot afford to let their feelings contradict them: they therefore reject the fact of suffering and condone any assault of physical suffering - the ills of children and the death of the gas chamber. Unlike self-contradicting materialists who admit the imperfection of suffering, these "logical people" cannot be reached by Miss O'Connor's argument that man is limited by physical defects and sufferings. Yet Flannery O'Connor's argument still holds against them. This is the reason why it is said above that for

Flannery O'Connor death is more than a symbol of physical defects which remind the thinker of any human limitation. Death is itself an irrefutable limit. Those who deny this limitation are simply not heard from again. Their argument ends in silence. Death itself is a limit because man must eventually negotiate this change in his being. Whatever changes is limited. Flannery O'Connor is still appealing to experience. She is no longer appealing to theology or mere consciousness but to the experience of death as simply one more facet of suffering, which is a defect. For those who deny feelings and deny the fact of suffering, Flannery O'Connor appeals to the ultimate change that places an end or limit to the present life. The human being is limited because not even the strongest materialist can deny death or at least deny it effectively without being laughed at for violating an obvious datum of experience. The human being and the whole physical world is limited because the physical undergoes changes, and death is a very personal change which even the most subjective thinker cannot deny even if he would wish to deny all other changes. Death proves human limitations. Death and other less compelling changes prove the finiteness of the world of matter.

Flannery O'Connor continues to use the experience of change as the basis of her argument that the essence of man and of this world is limitedness. Death is merely the example of a change whose importance and thoroughness no human can dispute because the change is his very consciousness. But the world is a place
where continual change occurs, change most men acknowledge, change that proves that the material world is not an ultimate and perfect existence.

Reason, as this discussion has already shown, urges man and especially the artist to look for the uniqueness of a thing. But "an identity is not to be found on the surface; it is not accessible to the poll-taker. . . . It is not made from the mean average or the typical, but from the hidden and often the most extreme." It cannot be found on the surface; it cannot be found in the fact of matter. The material world changes, and what changes is limited: something that was no longer exists. Identity cannot be found in the facts of matter because change proves the material world limited. Identity "is not made from what passes, but from those qualities that endure, regardless of what passes, because they are related to truth. It lies very deep." 28

These observations made by Flannery O'Connor are important for several reasons. Miss O'Connor states quite explicitly that the general experience of change - perhaps not as irrefutable, obvious, and final for a human subjectively as the undeniable change of death - is what characterizes things as limited. What Miss O'Connor points out here explicitly is that it is not just the human that is limited. The whole material world is limited:

28 Ibid.
"an identity is not to be found on the surface" in such material objects as "mocking birds and beaten biscuits and white columns" or in such changing actions as those which produce "hook worm and bare feet and muddy clay roads . . . . \[\text{and}\] the antics of politicians." The whole material world has limitedness as its basic identity. This passage indicates Flannery O'Connor's explicit use of the argument that material change implies limitedness, and her explicit statement that such a realization of finiteness flows from the search for the unique identity of things.

This passage is valuable, however, for another reason. Miss O'Connor's comment that an identity "is not accessible to the poll-taker," as well as the general tone of the passage in rejecting identity that is a mere reflection of observable objects or actions, refers this argument back to her analysis of the ills of modern man and modern society. Flannery O'Connor found fault with modern society because it violates one of the main tenets of her philosophy: it separates reason and feeling. Modern society is faulty because it neglects reason in overemphasizing the emotions alone. Modern society also is faulty because it neglects reason in neglecting reason's evidence that man is limited or evil. The present quotation reinforces Miss O'Connor's earlier position that modern culture neglects the evidence of reason, and it (along with

\[29\text{Ibid.}\]
all the other evidence of the world's limitedness) allows the investigator to perceive with fuller force what Miss O'Connor meant in her earlier condemnation of society. This present passage is all the more clearly linked to the earlier condemnation of society by the allusion to the "poll-taker." Earlier Flannery O'Connor had found fault with the way modern culture insists that truth can be "determined by survey," "in the light of statistics." Miss O'Connor is basically criticizing the materialism - a criticism which would seem to underlie her earlier use of the expression "the secular belief" of "the last few centuries." When this world is seen as not limited, when this world is the supreme being, man has ignored reason - either because he is drawn to this world by the emotions (the earlier argument against modern society) or because he has failed to acknowledge the obvious evidence of limitedness which is seen when reason begins its function of looking for essential identity. If identity is mocking birds, white columns, bare feet, and odd politicians, then materialism is supreme and this world is all that is important because it is the only thing that is. But because material objects pass away or change and actions change, these material objects and actions are limited; this world is identified as something limited, and


31 Ibid., 162
materialism is not allowable as a philosophy. Especially in Flannery O'Connor's South there are people who "believe in original sin," or whose "sense of evil [limitations] is still strong enough" whatever the reason. These people who still accept the finiteness of man and his world are therefore "skeptical about most modern solutions" and reject the way modern culture and modern science proclaim the perfection of man and the completeness of this world. When this world is seen as not limited, man determines truth by emotional affiliation with objects and things that matter; man determines truth by survey; man places first precedence on the prosperity of material accumulation, which strangely enough the "purely affirmative" critics wanted Miss O'Connor to emphasize in reflecting the good observable in the present world. This passage - as well as the earlier arguments about finiteness - therefore allows us to see with better perspective that Miss O'Connor is criticizing modern culture for its materialism, for making this world god, for its denial of the finiteness of this world. To Flannery O'Connor, materialism is the immediate moral evil, and it is a denial of the ontological evil or lack of being, the finiteness of this world.

32 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 381.
In investigating the nature of whatever Flannery O'Connor felt exceeded the limits of the world of matter, one confronts the notion of "mystery" in Miss O'Connor's thinking. "Mystery" is a complex problem in the thought of Flannery O'Connor because the notion has several seemingly different definitions. Study shows that basically "mystery" refers to the nature of whatever exceeds the limit of man and this material world; its several definitions are the result of several ways of looking at a problem which by very definition exceeds man's limits, even the limits of his mind, and therefore is difficult for man to define exactly.

Mystery gets its name from its first aspect as that which exceeds human reason. If reason's function is to discover facts about the identity of what exists, one would at first think that reason has no limit. Practically speaking, however, Miss O'Connor recognizes that while reason may not be ultimately limited at least in its potentiality, it has limits as regards man's ability to use it in this life. Because reason, as was seen earlier, exists in a unified personality together with emotions, reason as it is used in this world is limited. Moreover, if what exists in the material world is limited, then there are limits to what reason can know. Reason is limited first of all by the fact that it is not able to grasp even all the facts that exist, limited though these facts about the material world may be. The eye of
reason learns "as much of the world as can be got into it." More important, however, is the fact that reason reaches its limits when it investigates "human action . . . illuminated and outlined by mystery," by mystery of which reason has only a hint, "a hint of the unknown, of death." What lies beyond the limits of matter and what lies beyond the power of humans - death, Flannery O'Connor's supreme symbol of finiteness - lies beyond the limits of reason. Reason investigates identity and finds essential facts, essential characteristics, but eventually it confronts the final unique characteristic of humans and of the material world, the fact that all is limited. What lies beyond reason, the "unknown," is mystery.

Thus as an author Flannery O'Connor feels she has reason for the grotesque. The grotesque is necessary because men neglect reason - in denying human nature by the separation of reason and feeling and denying human nature by blindness to the finiteness of things. As a person who judges thus, Flannery O'Connor feels that there is only the grotesque, only one way to use reason "to find in the object, in the situation, in the sequence, the spirit which makes it itself," - only one way to bring out the essen-

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33 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.
35 Ibid.
tial limitedness: "I have to imbue this action or object, or situation with an awe and terror which will suggest its awful mystery," the mystery which lies beyond the limitedness of its place in the world of matter. "I have to distort the look of the thing in order to represent as I see them both the mystery and the fact." Flannery O'Connor feels that she must use the grotesque "death and its foreshadowings" - defect, limitation, evil - to represent the realm of mystery, the realm of what lies beyond reason's discovery of essential finiteness. Miss O'Connor sees an object, situation, action or sequence of action - any configuration of material thing - as composed of "both the mystery and the fact." Facts, items which are available to the poll-takers, the statistical survey, any knowledge of the material world, are eventually insufficient because these very facts and reason itself eventually confront the limitedness of this world, mystery. A thing is known in its facts and in its mystery.

Ordinary men and especially artists must know a thing in its facts and in its mystery; "it is what is left over after everything explainable has been explained that makes a story worth writing and worth reading. The writer's gaze has to extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that

37 For an earlier discussion of the artist-as-pollster see p. 99.
38 An artist has this special obligation because he is committed to reason whose most basic function of finding identity eventually reveals the essence of limitedness - mystery.
realm of mystery. If a writer believes that the life of men is and will remain essentially mysterious (i.e., in the terms of our analysis "essentially limited"), what he sees on the surface or what he understands, will be of interest to him only as it leads him into the experience of mystery itself.39 Reason has its limits. The world of matter has its limits; it has its facts. "After everything has been explained . . . beyond the surface" of objects and of actions ("mere problems") in this material world of fact about the identity, there remains mystery beyond the surface, beyond the mere facts. Material objects and even humans interest the writer, but he eventually plunges beyond the facts to mystery if he is an artist as distinguished from a survey-taking sociologist or advertising man.40 Thus again the story of Mary Ann "belonged to fact and not to fancy." Flannery O'Connor recognizes that a thing exists in its fact and in its mystery. The facts of a thing are the concern of a sociologist, the advertising man, or the historian. The literary person is the person who is concerned with a thing's mystery, with fancy. Flannery O'Connor "wanted to make it plain that I was not the one to write the factual story";


40 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 163. See also earlier reference in this study, pp. 36-8.
Miss O'Connor is the literary poet who writes fancy.41 This is the explanation of how "what's reasonable is seldom safe, and always exciting"42 - of how reason brings man to mystery.

As a corollary to this theory, one now has philosophical justification for Flannery O'Connor's first two laws for the fiction writer. Miss O'Connor's own experience and the recommendation of others such as Conrad have led her to posit clear vision of the material object, character, actions or series of actions as the first operation of the fiction writer.43 The writer then moves to "inscape," the characteristic that makes anything unique.

The above discussion shows that the process is the same with all men: from a clear look at the outside of things, from an honest and logical thinking about matter and experiencing of matter, man moves to analyze the essential limitedness of things. All men move from the outside facts to the interior mystery. Thus, Flannery O'Connor agrees with the common observation that "the writer does call up the general and maybe the essential through the particular, but this general and essential is deeply imbedded in mystery." Reason investigates the essential, the unique.

identity, but the general or essential generally goes beyond fact to mystery; "it is not answerable to any of our formulas. It doesn't rest finally in a statable kind of solution." It goes beyond "paraphrase, logic, formula, instant and correct answers." It reaches knowledge of limitedness. The pursuit of the unique identity ends with man "imbedded in mystery."

Study has shown that Flannery O'Connor defines "mystery" as the label for the realm of limitation. Mystery is negatively defined as what lies beyond reason because it lies beyond the limitation of physical being, a limitation which is the ultimate business of reason to come to know. Thus far the definition of mystery has been negative, in terms of limitation or lack of being. The investigation must now discover more of the positive characteristics of "mystery" in Flannery O'Connor's thinking, because although the physical world is limited, reason is not confined to knowing the merely physical world.

Flannery O'Connor does believe that there is something beyond the limitations of the material world. There is no great void, unknown and unknowable. After telling Sr. Gable that the essential does not lie in surfaces, matter or facts, Miss O'Connor explains that this sense of limitedness "ought to throw you back on the living God." In explaining that essential

45 Ibid.
identity brings knowledge of limitations, Flannery O'Connor goes on to explain that there are further "qualities that endure," qualities that are "hidden," qualities that lie buried deep," qualities that are known in their "entirety . . . . only to God." 46 This mystery is ultimately known only to God because only He (Unlimited Being) is infinite enough to comprehend what is infinite. Man's reason is finite, and besides it is inseparably linked in the human personality with the emotions. The "hidden" quality which a thing possesses beyond its material limits is spirit -- non-material existence, deep and hidden because it cannot be seen and weighed as can matter.

Those who do not share Flannery O'Connor's theology may feel that at this point they can no longer accept logically what she is saying because she has left philosophy for theology as she invokes "mystery." One must, however, allow neither a knowledge that Miss O'Connor accepted orthodox theology nor the theological connotations of her terms in the statement above to cause one to mistake her real meaning. When she says that knowledge of limitations should throw a person back on the living God, she is defining mystery as God -- she is using theological categories for a nun who is more at home reading a letter which contained these categories of thought. Flannery O'Connor is not preaching some

dogmatic creed; she is defining mystery as God and as "that which exists because it has to be," being without limit. Such a definition is still distinctly philosophical because it is nothing more than a logical consequence of the realization that the being which humans experience in this world is limited. No use is made of revelation or theology. Flannery O'Connor very frequently insisted that the ultimate reality should not be given a name that suggested some particular creed. She would prefer that ultimate reality be named by the original Biblical definition of God as simply "what is." A vision of "what is" can be detached from faith, although the Christian believer will keep the two together.\(^4^7\) That which is "absolute," that which is beyond limited matter known by surveys, is called "what is."\(^4^8\) The ultimate reality which the Christian Flannery O'Connor calls God is not something discovered by the "thinness" of abstractions, "logic" or "formulas" of faith; it is not something judged. None of these things can take precedence over encounter or can come "before we experience."\(^4^9\) Again and again Miss O'Connor tries to rework the wordings and definitions so that the reader will not be led to ignore her train of thought because he finds that thought sometimes using words with specific theological connotations. No merely dry definitions

\(^{4^7}\) O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734.


can take precedence over encounter or experience because the ultimate reality is the thing whose most descriptive attribute is not that it is Christian or knowable in a certain way but that it is "living": existing is its attribute. Man must come "into the experience of mystery." Flannery O'Connor's notion of God is the existentialist notion of perfect existence. Flannery O'Connor's terms may be drawn from theology and she may ultimately use these notions as the foundation for extra theological levels of meaning, but her notions are valid philosophically.

Flannery O'Connor next considers how man is to make contact with his ultimate reality of God. One way is through the prophet:

"Prophecy, which is dependent on the imagination and not the moral faculty, need not be a matter of predicting the future." The "concern of prophets" is "mystery." Thus, the prophet-freaks of Southern literature are not images of man in the street. They are images of man forced out to meet the extremes of his own

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51 The artist is a type of prophet. Later, pages this study will observe why Flannery O'Connor felt this was true and what bearing this notion has on Miss O'Connor's theory of what a writer should do.

The prophet is one who realizes that identity "is not made from the mean average or the typical, but from the hidden and often the most extreme." The prophet studies unique identity until he finds what the average "man in the street" of modern culture does not learn: the "extreme," the limitation that is characteristic of essences in this world once a person discovers their extreme or ending limit, "mystery." One meaning of prophecy, therefore, is "the prophetic sense of 'seeing through' reality" not to an emptiness but to what lies beyond limited secular realities. Prophecy is "a powerful extension of sight" whereby the prophet is capable "of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up." The prophet can see that there is the limited matter and the spirit which gives this finite thing being but which is "far" from the capability of limited humans. The prophet can see that what is limited cannot be enjoying full being, that full being must throb within it to make limited matter real. Its limitation is that it cannot exist (or exist fully) of itself.

Moreover, the prophet does not hold matter and spirit separate: he can "penetrate matter until spirit is revealed in it." Like Teilhard De Chardin's, the prophet's vision sweeps

forward without detaching itself at any point from the earth."57

... You have to keep ... anchored to the earth."58 In seeing
that the finite thing of this world must be united to some facet
of "what is," the prophet "sweeps forward" to experience "close
up" spirit penetrating matter of the "earth." The notion of
prophecy reveals one of Flannery O'Connor's most important notions:
the fact that if a person is aware of what he is doing he experi­
ences spirit-in-matter. Flannery O'Connor's admiration for
Chardin is more understandable when one sees her thus echoing
Chardin's call for the world of matter to evolve to a world of
spirit. In her article praised as fully acceptable by Flannery
O'Connor, Sr. Gable stresses the importance of this notion when
she points out that the key to Miss O'Connor's ecumenism is that
each story is a "little incarnation."59 Miss O'Connor's incarna­
tionalism will not allow a world-view that posits matter alone or
spirit alone; she prefers "the concrete and living symbol"60 not
just concreteness alone or symbol alone. Just as the Incarnation
theologically is the joining of the purest spirit and unlimited
being of God with the matter of man, so Flannery O'Connor keeps

57 Flannery O'Connor, Review of Chardin's The Phenomenon Of

58 O'Connor, Letter to Sr. Mary-Alice, "My Mentor, Flannery

59 Sister Mariella Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's
Fiction," 143.

60 Robert Fitzgerald, "Introduction," Everything That Rises Must
Converge.
merging her "prophetic" vision, a consciousness of the world of spirit supporting the limitedness of matter and therefore penetrating matter with its essential existence. Contact is made with ultimate reality if one is a prophet or has access to one.

That Flannery O'Connor thinks that all men should have this prophetic vision is proved in three ways. This paper has already seen her insistence that all should recognize the limits of this world and the nature of mystery. The prophet's vision that spirit-existence penetrates void-matter is simply another of Miss O'Connor's expanding definitions of mystery, for she has said that the "concern of prophets" is mystery. Miss O'Connor's reasoning about how the Church must pass on the prophetic vision "good for all time" suggests that one value of the Church is to keep men in contact with God when their own prophetic ability is weak: "Christian dogma... guarantees respect for mystery." Finally, the prophetic vision is for all men because the prophet has the "second function of recalling people to known

61 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor; 'Literary Witch,'" 384.
63 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 161. One might point out here then that religious faith provides of course another method of contacting ultimate reality. True to her incarnational philosophy of seeing the ultimate penetrated with the limited, however, Flannery O'Connor does not make a blind leap of faith. She argues philosophically to the existence of God, etc., upon which a more rational faith is securely built.
but ignored truths," truths which he possesses and which all men through him must also possess. 64

There is another way of obtaining this contact with ultimate reality.

If a man or writer "uses his eyes . . . honestly . . . his sense of mystery and his acceptance of it will be increased." 65

In addition to the way prophetic vision is important for giving the mind a consciousness or "sense of prophecy," the appetitive senses of man are also to be engaged in an "acceptance" of mystery. This notion becomes binding in light of Flannery O'Connor's "definition" of God as "what is." Man contacts ultimate reality by experiencing how "what is" gives existence to this limited world that essentially does not exist of itself.

Along with a clarification of this notion of acceptance comes, incidentally, another proof that Flannery O'Connor views reason as inadequate for making contact with ultimate reality. Since reason is, as has been shown earlier, only a part of the full human personality, a man would be wrong to try to engage reason alone. Reason must be used: "everything has its testing point in the eye," but the eye of reason is not used properly

64 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734.

65 O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 72.
unless it is "an organ which eventually involves the whole person-
ality." Man would need reason and the appetitive functions of
his personality. But in contacting the ultimate reality, feelings
are not sufficient appetitive operation: the ultimate reality
is contacted by an experience, but when a person disconnects an
experience "from its meaning in life and makes it simply an ex-
perience for its own sake" he is not making contact with ulti-
mate reality. He is contacting material emotions, bodily func-
tions that contact merely more matter. The appetitive function
required for contact with ultimate reality is free will -
acceptance of the world's limits and of mystery's fullness,
not merely emotional reaction. Approvingly, Flannery O'Connor
supports her notion by the testimony of others: "Msgr. Romano
Guardini has written that the roots of the eye are in the heart."
She adds that for the Catholic whose faith commits him to the
world beyond matter or for the writer and human who has committed
himself to a world beyond matter, "those roots stretch far into
those depths of mystery" - not heart for its own sake, but
experience engaging with the mystery of "what is." Flannery
O'Connor's use of metaphor in these phrases is telling. The eye

66 Ibid., 733.
67 Ibid., 734.
68 Ibid., 733.
must be used. Flannery O'Connor's earlier usage has defined the eye as the faculty which apprehends, both in the matter of reason which sees the hidden essence and the matter of "prophetic vision." But that eye involves the "whole personality"; "heart" suggests the remaining ability of feeling and the newly introduced free will, man's other appetitive faculty. The prophet was seen to have two functions. His imagination is conscious of how "what is" saturates limited beings; but since man has both this sense of "imagination and . . . moral faculty," the prophet is eventually involved in affecting what is moral in man. The prophet concerns himself both with what is known and what is "ignored," with both reason and will. Likewise man contacts ultimate reality with consciousness of an "incarnationalist" view and with acceptance affirmed by free will.

One might at first think that Flannery O'Connor is giving a new definition of mystery when she had the creative writer say that "the mystery of personality is what interests the artist." This is not a special kind of mystery for artists alone however. She is merely using different words to affirm her notion that mystery or ultimate reality is "incarnationalist." Man's most

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70 O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 72. One should note that the word "ignored" implies a defect of the will — unlike "forgotten."

71 O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," 83.
telling experience of something that forces on him the notion of a freely-willed acceptance of the divine-in-matter, of matter "penetrated . . . until the spirit is revealed in it," is the human personality which combines body and spirit into one inseparable being. Thus Miss O'Connor would disagree with the rationalist who would worry about personality "if it were at all necessary." To Flannery O'Connor it is necessary. To her, what is necessary is "your existential encounter with his man's personality." The human personality is man's most familiar experience of incarnation which is the ultimate reality. Man must sense this and all "incarnations" of "what is" incorporated in the limited; he must "accept" them in a respectful "encounter."

These two moral imperatives apply to man's daily life in two ways. In both man fails, in Flannery O'Connor's thinking and in her stories, when he is "lost in that abyss which opens up for man when he sets himself up as God." Man fails when he tries "to eliminate mystery" or when he "tries to rediscover it in disciplines less personally demanding than religion."

72 Ibid.


74 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.
With his rationalist-sentimentalism that defies the unified incarnationalist personality, man tries to eliminate mystery through a failing of the mind. Man fails when he refuses to recognize the limitedness of this world and thereby denies mystery or the validity of God — being-in-matter. Adopting the modern "secular belief" that only the world of matter is real, man sets himself in the place of God. This man affirms as absolute the material prosperity — a deification that Flannery O'Connor decries in "The Fiction Writer and His Country" as an affirmation and knowledge that merely gathers facts about this world. Such a man is convinced that his time is spent well when he is "busy cutting down human imperfection," when he presumes that man's perfection is the use of his own powers and that he is therefore "done with" God. 75 For him knowledge of any higher end either does not "exist at all" or is taken to be a thing of this world "knowable by sensation." 76 Every man, even the saint, with "anything he touches . . . deforms [It] slightly in his own image." 77 Instead of man's being the image and likeness of God, all things are made to be the image and likeness of man. Man idolizes himself and the material world by thinking it absolute, by making himself

75 O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35.
God when he tries "to measure himself against Truth, and not the other way around." The resulting deification through lack of "self-knowledge" with its rejection of material finiteness and of the spirit-in-matter shows as lack of humility.\(^7\) Man makes himself God. Man fails by the practice of sham and by his excessively rationalistic elimination of mystery.

Man's sham idolizing of himself when reason is divorced from a full view of personhood leads to the second failing: when man makes himself God he knows no rigors of law and looks for "disciplines less personally demanding than religion." Complacent lack of need for rigor tilts man, as we have seen, into pursuing excessive emotional satisfactions. Ease is obtained because such a man has "reduced his conception of the supernatural to pious cliché."\(^7\) "The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliché or a smoothing down that will soften their real look."\(^8\) The will of such a man does not accept mystery.

Flannery O'Connor would expect to see these two modes of failure counteracted by two modes of goodness. Her basic principle here is that out of evil comes good. This principle can be

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8\(^0\) O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35.
supported in Flannery O'Connor's philosophy because it is the
logical outgrowth of her incarnationalist view: blended into
evil or limitation of being is the fullness of being or good -
just as spirit is blended into matter and produces the perfection
of person. In fact one should not even say "just as" spirit is
blended into matter, for the process whereby the fullness of
being in spirit is blended into matter is itself an example of
good incarnated in what is at least ontological evil. This
principle can also be supported by Miss O'Connor's theology and
by her experience of life.

Flannery O'Connor's theological support of this principle
is seen in her emphasis on Christ and Redemption. Redemption
has a primacy in Flannery O'Connor's thoughts because it is the
prime theological example of good evolving from evil. Those
who accuse Flannery O'Connor of separating belief and sensibility
because she places primary stress on redemption have not seen
that Miss O'Connor's emphasis on redemption stems from her notion
that it is just such a primary theological example of good
evolving from evil - not some kind of personal fixation with
evil. Because of man's evil, God appeared to bring goodness.
Flannery O'Connor emphasizes the person of Christ because it is
the prime theological example of how "what is" joins with limited
matter: the person of Christ presents the supreme Incarnation.
Man is acting properly when "Christ is the center of his life," therefore, when his central concern is with the union of spirit and matter in personality, of which union Christ is the fullest of spirits, full being, the most perfect possible example to one who shares Miss O'Connor's theology. The person, uniting matter and being — especially Christ's Person, which also unites full infiniteness (God) with the finite (man-matter) — is thus a prime example and expression of the incarnationalist philosophy of Flannery O'Connor. Finally Flannery O'Connor's concern with nature and grace stems from her notion that good evolves from evil. The sense of mystery and an acceptance of it comes when the supernatural is grounded in concrete matter. The "Manichean" separation of nature and grace is faulty. Grace or the supernatural, "what is," can only be real if it is founded on nature. Miss O'Connor realizes that his theological view is "a dimension which many cannot, in conscience, acknowledge." But her principles do not depend on the theology for acceptance. These theological aspects are a dimension added to what philosophy and personal experience should show as the inescapable view of an incarnationalist personalism wherein good evolves from evil. Those who cannot accept Flannery O'Connor's theological theories should not

complain "as long as what they can acknowledge is present" in her philosophy or writing. 82 "A dimension taken away is one thing; a dimension added is another." 83

Flannery O'Connor's personal experience in writing stories also shows good evolving from evil. When she writes a story, Flannery O'Connor feels a writer must "start with something you know - an incident, perhaps - and you work with that. You don't know, really which way it is going. You leave yourself open to the way it will go. Sometimes you know it isn't going the right way. You may have to put the story away for three years before you know how to do it. But you have to be willing to do the wrong things so that you can come to the right things." 84 Miss O'Connor tells of a woman related to her, a woman who had married a man who did not think the Catholic Church had much to offer. He went with the woman to Mass on Sundays, however, and "after he had been doing that about twelve years or so, he came into the Church. We were considerably surprised. I said to him, 'whatever got you interested?' and he said, 'Well, the sermons were so terrible, I knew

Thus Flannery O'Connor can claim that while one should not read her devil theologically as "the devil who goes about seeking whom he may devour," yet for her the added theological dimension is also present and she is careful to be certain that the devil is identified as the devil, ("Lucifer, fallen angel") and not simply taken for this or that psychological tendency. The word "simply" is the operative word here. (Flannery O'Connor, Letter to John Hawkes, cited in John Hawkes, "Flannery O'Connor's Devil," 100,406.

82 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734 - for these arguments on theological acceptance as well as nature and grace.
there must be something else to it to get all those people there Sunday after Sunday.' The Lord can use anything, but you just think he shouldn't have to." 85 The notion that good evolves from evil is a perhaps unpopular notion, which even many who accept Flannery O'Connor's theology would like to think unnecessary. Miss O'Connor's experience, however, confirms this theological notion, a notion that enjoys the highest stamp of orthodoxy even from biblical times: "in the Gospels it was the devils who first recognized Christ, and the evangelists didn't censor this information. They apparently thought it was pretty good witness. It scandalizes us when we see the same thing in modern dress only because we have this defensive attitude towards the faith." 86 In story after story Flannery O'Connor illustrates this principle of good evolving from evil. In The Violent Bear It Away, Miss O'Connor comments on the operation whereby good evolves from evil: "by the permissive will of Providence the devil overplays his hand," 87 and leads Tarwater to his final destiny.

Violence of action, intensity of will, is what causes good to

86 O'Connor, Letter to Sr. Mariella Gable, 141.
87 Robert M. McGown, S.J. "The Education of a Prophet; a Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, (1962), 77. One should note that McCown's remarks have a special authenticity because of the strong approval Miss O'Connor gave to this particular article.
evolve from evil: "the violent bear it away." Flannery O'Connor's incarnationalist personalism is not something that "can be taken half way or . . . is particularly easy in these times." Those who soften the good with cliche or with emotional ease lack this proper violent intensity. They are in bondage to the many whims of emotions that crave in many contradictory directions. It is in this sense that free will "does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man." Real freedom, therefore, is not gained but destroyed by sins ignoring mystery in pursuit of bondage to the physical and emotional. Flannery O'Connor's characters are not victim of her philosophical determinism because Tarwater, for example, "is certainly free and meant to be; if he appears to have a compulsion to be a prophet, I can only insist that in this compulsion there is a mystery of God's will over him and that it is not a compulsion in the clinical sense." Since Flannery O'Connor's prophet-freaks are not so much merely psychologically wanting - as they are psychologically wanting and incomplete because they are theologically or morally wanting - criticism of Miss O'Connor is misdirected when "its clinical bias invariably approaches them Flannery O'Connor's characters] from the stand-

point of abnormal psychology." What appears to be theological or philosophical determinism and the abnormal psychological compulsions of Flannery O'Connor's characters is really the integrity of their intensity or "vigor." "They are real" characters, "and if they are people who deal with life on more fundamental, even more violent terms than most of us, this doesn't make them mythical monsters." Real freedom lies in the fact that "man is so free that with his last breath he can say No." Man is bound by God's will in Providence as he is bound by God's will by the fact of his nature. This is what Flannery O'Connor meant when she said that reason is to be used to find "an answering reason in everything" the artist sees. Man is not thereby compelled. Maybe the actions which God or the ultimate skein of being (to be less theological) wills are accomplished; that is not to say that man will accept them in his own consciousness. Man can still say No - regardless of what he does or must do externally. No one would claim man lacks freedom because he cannot fly. Man has certain freedoms and lacks certain "freedoms." The reader must understand where freedom is in life -- and where or what it is in Miss O'Connor's writings. The intensity in Flannery

93 O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 4-5.
O'Connor's characters is not compulsion but the throb of being that is present, full-being not ignored or stifled but pushing out against man's limitations to a fuller freedom, a fuller being. Those who lack this intensity lack freedom because they are in bonds to the sway of emotional finiteness and are not firmly moving towards a goal of ultimate being.

Those who lack this intensity, moreover, those who idolize man and matter by sham do not have enough intensity to face man's limitations and therefore never pierce through these limitations to the full freedom of being. The extremeness of the "prophet-freaks" of Flannery O'Connor's stories is their intensity, strong enough to cause them to be "held by a sense of mystery" however much they may "long to embrace" pretense and ease.96

People make a judgement of fanaticism by what they are themselves. To a lot of Protestants I know, monks and nuns are fanatics, none greater. And to a lot of monks and nuns I know, my Protestant prophets are fanatics. For my part, I think the only difference between them is that if you are a Catholic and have this intensity of belief you join the convent and are heard no more; whereas if you are a Protestant and have it, there is no convent for you to join and you go about the world getting into all sorts of trouble and drawing the wrath of people who don't believe anything much at all down on your head.97

The test of whether man ultimately succeeds or fails in life is to see whether he has retained sufficient intensity to counteract sham and emotional ease, whether he shows the fullness of being

96 0'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 381.
throbS within him. For the writer it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of illuminating the picture and giving it life. So that while predictable predetermined actions have a comic interest for me, it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I have always had my eye on as the thing that will make the story work. In the story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," it is the grandmother's recognition that the Misfit is one of her children; in "The River," it is the child's peculiar desire to find the kingdom of Christ; in "The Artificial Nigger," it is what the artificial nigger does to reunite Mr. Head and Nelson. None of these things can be predicted. They represent the working of grace for the characters.

The intensity of free will is a sudden thing. The basic issue is whether man will accept grace - Flannery O'Connor's theological term, as we have seen, for the energy of "What is" incarnated in matter. Miss O'Connor's position can be viewed with the added theological dimension that man's moment of grace is his chance to affirm the supreme Incarnation - or it can be viewed with merely the philosophical dimension that man must be intense enough to affirm limited matter penetrated by spirit - incarnationalism. Miss O'Connor herself calls this crucial point in her stories the "moment of grace," in this particular sense of the word. In any event, the crucial issue is whether man has sufficient intensity. If he has sufficient intensity, force of will, he will


reject the ease of cliché and the illusion, he will persevere in observing the value of idolized matter until he discovers its limitedness, he will find experience itself complex enough to have him respect the complex duality of the person. For Flannery O'Connor the integrity, for example, of Hazel Motes in Wise Blood lies in his not being able to get rid of the "vigor" with which the "ragged figure" keeps moving "from tree to tree in the back of his mind." Tarwater faces the same problem because this same intensity is "in the darkest, most private part of his soul, hanging upside down like a sleeping bat."

Thus, if a man has sufficient intensity to carry his materialism and self-deification to its own extreme, he will find at this extreme intensity of evil that he is doing the work of good, that he has become a prophet of mystery. Flannery O'Connor, therefore, asserts that the moments of grace in her stories "are prepared for - by me anyway - by the intensity of the evil circumstances." Translating this notion into her theological terms, Miss O'Connor asserts that her devil is one who goes about "piercing pretensions." The very height of evil is what results in good - because goodness is that height, that intensity which


is present blended with evil - because intensity is a facet of "what is" and therefore of goodness. The moment of grace comes when the violence of Miss O'Connor's characters causes them, even in violence of evil, to reject sham. Intensity itself is, of course, by its very definition the antidote to the other failing.

Sr. Gable's conversation with Flannery O'Connor brings added explicit support for this notion: Sr. Gable "has it on Flannery O'Connor's word" that the devil made concrete in the pervert of The Violent Bear It Away overreaches himself and does God's work despite his evil intent. Miss O'Connor confirms this statement with her own words: "In my stories a reader will find that the devil accomplishes a good deal of ground work that seems to be necessary before grace is effective. Tarwater's final vision could not have been brought off if he hadn't met the man in the lavender and cream-colored car." Good comes when a man has a "vision of Moses' face as he pulverized our idols." The prophet's violence of pulverizing destroys the pretense of the deified materialistic idol. Even despite his emotional desire for ease, the man who is intense will move through and pierce

through pretense. The pain involved in this piercing, the pain involved in denying emotional desire will not be a hurt; it will be the evil that perfects. "Those who, like Tarwater, see, will see what they have no desire to see and the vision will be the purifying fire." \(^{106}\) Good comes when intense evil shatters evil, when evil is found at its own extreme of intensity (which is a goodness), when intense evil pierces sham.

Just as, theologically, man's good Redemption is bound with the evil of Original Sin, philosophically man's good fullness of spirit-being is bound with his evil limitations, and psychologically his conscious acceptance of mystery grows from an intensity of evil repudiating mystery - so also in one other sense, morally, "in us the good is something under construction"; "human imperfection \(\mathcal{I}s\) . . . the raw material of good." Just as intense fullness of being manifests itself for humans in intense action that pierces pretentions, it also forges ahead to create new being in place of the nothingness of limitation or evil. Fullness of being, intensity of action, manifested itself for God in the work of creation - which even the Biblical account views as unfinished. Man's own share of this fullness of being performs the same creative action: making being where none previously existed.

This process can be stated in theological terms; "The Creative Action of the Christian's life is to prepare his death in Christ. The non-being of death is filled with being - theologically, with the fullness of being of united matter - spirit, Christ. The process can, however, also be stated without reference to revelation and theology; man's creative action is a "continuous action in which this world's goods are utilized to the fullest, both positive gifts and what Père Teilhard de Chardin calls 'passive diminishments.'"¹⁰⁷ Like Mary Ann, men "build upon" their diminishments" or lack of being in a creative action that blends all separateness into unity through love's respect for the person. Thus the limitation of separate uniqueness loses its lack of being and full existence from intense love's union of all men, of all being (including therefore even the widest philosophical definition of God).

This action is what Flannery O'Connor describes in theological terms as follows: "This action by which charity grows invisibly among us, entwining the living and the dead, is called by the Church the Communion of Saints. It is a communion created upon human imperfection, created from what we make of our grotesque state; lines that join the most diverse lives and hold us fast in Christ."¹⁰⁸ The ultimate reality for Flannery

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 35.
O'Connor will exist when the limitedness of man and his world is sufficiently created upon by intense will - action or love. This limitedness is replaced by fullness of "what is." Miss O'Connor agrees, then, with Chardin's view that the ultimate action of this world is a "search for the human significance of the evolutionary process," whereby matter's evil evolves into being's goodness.

Acting as a symbol of Miss O'Connor's system of thought is the life of her most cherished author, Hawthorne. The life of Hawthorne and of his daughter Rose, the nun Mother Alphonsa, is praised because reason's true view was in them converted into intense act and eventually into charity's unity; "the ice in the blood which he feared, and which this very fear preserved him from, was turned by her into a warmth that initiated action. If he observed, fearfully but truthfully, if he acted, reluctantly but firmly, she charged ahead, secure in the path her truthfulness had outlined for her."¹¹⁰ Consciousness of defect with firmness not emotionally pleasing causes good to emerge from evil and evolves into the wider unity theologically called "Christ-likeness" that surmounts even the capital symbol of limitation, death; the work of modern nuns doing good in the order which Rose

¹⁰⁹ O'Connor, Review of Chardin's The Phenomenon of Man, 618.
Hawthorne founded "is the tree sprung from small act of Christlikeness and Mary Ann is its flower. By reason of the fear, the search, the charity that marked his life and influenced his daughters, Mary Ann inherited, a century later the wealth of wisdom that taught her what to make of her death. III

Flannery O'Connor's positive thinking about the meaning of life, therefore, asserts that man is essentially fallen, limited, evil. Miss O'Connor presents her view psychologically, philosophically, theologically, morally -- she repeats her basic positions from all these different viewpoints. The critic must be careful not to shun her theological terms simply because he may disagree with Miss O'Connor's basic theology. Regardless of whether she is using philosophical, psychological or moral terms - her basic message is that man has limitations. Pride of idolatry denies these limitations and/or seeks to ignore them. Incarnated with these limitations and best seen in the human person (or in Christ for those who accept Miss O'Connor's theology) is a surge of "what is," a throb of the fullness of being. Out of man's very evil comes evil's incarnated good. Out of man's fall comes his rise. Speaking of winter as real winter, as her own suffering, and as this worldly life in general, Flannery O'Connor wrote a few weeks...
before she died: "After the suffering of this winter, Easter will be a true resurrection for me." Love insures an even greater fullness of being whereby man rises from his limitations and finds goodness in his limitations and eventually unites with all other men and with the God who is Existence, for in addition to the rising, "everything that rises must converge."

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Flannery O'Connor's views on the meaning of life are very closely related to her technique of writing stories. Her theory that a material object or person is valuable because it is matter penetrated with spirit leads her logically to her technical requirement that the writer is to see the outside of an object or action, then to look beyond the material to the essential identity of the object and thence into mystery.

The outside world which Flannery O'Connor chose to portray in her stories was most often the South. An examination of why she chose the South as her external object will reveal not only its own importance in her fictional technique, but also several other important notions which Miss O'Connor had developed about the technique of writing fiction. Once this outside world, the South, has been examined through Flannery O'Connor's eyes, this study will proceed with Miss O'Connor to look through that outside to more essential elements to her fictional world.

One explanation for Flannery O'Connor's writing about the South may be that she is drawing characters and incidents from real life. For example, the remote Georgia farm run by a strong-willed widow with several Negro helpers and a Polish family of
refugees, a family with a history of local aristocracy, the flood of peacocks—all these details from Flannery O'Connor's own daily life appear very vividly in "The Displaced Person." Miss O'Connor herself increased the likelihood of such an interpretation because she frequently made remarks like the following: "my own sense of place is quite unadjustable. I have a friend from Michigan who went to Germany and Japan and who wrote stories about Germans who sounded like Germans and about Japanese who sounded like Japanese. I know if I tried to write stories about credible Japanese they would all sound like Herman Tallmadge."¹ A character in Miss O'Connor's stories "talks Southern because I do." Again she seemed to value being Southern for its own sake or for the sake of realism as she claimed that "when The Georgia Bulletin starts sounding as if it were issued in Philadelphia, I'm going to drop my subscription."² But "when someone wants to know whether her characters are drawn from real life, Flannery replied that if she had known many of the people she wrote about she mightn't be around to write about them." Perhaps humorously thinking of her many grotesques, Flannery O'Connor disappoints a realist by asserting that few readers even "claim to see themselves" in her characters.³ She explains further that her

¹O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 5.
³Margaret Inman Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" The Colorado Quarterly, X (Spring, 1952), 382.
characters are real - not in the literal sense of being copies from life, but as types that still exist in the South, not evident to tourists perhaps, but they are there all the same."\(^4\) The policy of not having the details of a story merely reflect local conditions is of course harmonious with Miss O'Connor's previous condemnations of the mirror theory of art and harmonious with her rejection of mere superficial "survey takers." The South is already producing more such so-called writers, "more amateur authors than there are rivers and streams. In almost every hamlet you'll find at least one lady writing epics in Negro dialect and probably two or three old gentlemen who have impossible historical novels on the way. The woods are full of regional writers, and it is the great horror of every serious Southern writer that he will become one of them."\(^5\) In all such "abundance there are temptations which none but the sturdiest writer can withstand. The most obvious is to use all this regional matter for no better purpose than to illustrate the region."\(^6\) Flannery O'Connor rejects the "loftiest calls. . . . for a brand of social realism that no serious novelist has been interested in for twenty years."\(^7\) Realistic stories that are mere replicas of reality,

\(^7\) O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 12.
therefore, are in too great an abundance and substitute Flannery O'Connor's sense of mystery for "peculiar quaintness." Being a "Georgia writer" has some other more "positive significance." 8

The proposal that the "South is being exploited now for its immediate fictional gains, let's say commercial gain, etc., that it is . . . too popular," was quickly denied when Miss O'Connor replied: "I don't know any Southern writers who are making a killing except Faulkner, you know. We are all just limping along." 9 Miss O'Connor uses the South for a topic but she uses the South not because of doctrine or realism nor because the South as a topic is saleable and popular with the audience.

Another possible reason why Miss O'Connor writes about the South may be that she feels an "isolation from the rest of the country." 10 Some of Miss O'Connor's statements seem to support this theory and to imply that the writer is not interested in communication. She told Granville Hicks that if she cared what people thought about what she wrote she "would have dried up long ago." 11 A similar respect for aloneness appears in this statement: "one reason I like to publish short stories is that nobody pays any attention to them. In ten years or so when they begin to be

9 O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 14
10 O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 159
known, the process has not been obnoxious. When you publish a
novel, the racket is like a fox in a hen house."12 Whether or not
people were reading her books was not important; "I'm delighted
just to know that someone remembers my books two years after it
was published and can get the name of it straight."13

The "purely affirmative" Catholic critic can be safely dis­
regarded because "if in the future we get any real novel by
Catholics in this country we may be sure that they will not be
the kind of novel that the reading public thinks it wants, or
that the critics demand, but will be the kind of novel that
interests the novelist."14 Even more obviously expressive of her
apparent lack of concern for readers is her opinion that "the
writer is free only when he can tell the reader to go jump in
the lake. You want, of course, to get across to him what you
have to show; but whether he likes it or not is no concern of
yours."15

This last statement, however, shows signs that Miss O'Connor
disdain for the public is only apparent; "of course" the writer
wants to communicate to the reader. The absoluteness of the
rejection of readers is hedged by her remark that she was not

14 O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 11
concerned with writing best-sellers and with book-club ratings because "a few readers to a long way if they're the right kind." 16

She expands this notion of having a few good readers with an example:

There's a story about Faulkner that I like. It may be apocryphal but it's nice anyway. A local lady is supposed to have rushed up to him in a drug store in Oxford and said, "Oh, Mr. Faulkner, Mr. Faulkner, I've just bought your book! But before I read it, I want you to tell me something; do you think I'll like it?" And Faulkner is supposed to have said, "Yes, I think you'll like that book. It's trash." It wasn't trash and she probably didn't like it, but there are others who did, and you may be sure that if there were two or three in Oxford who liked it, two or three of an honest and unpretentious vent who relished it as they would relish a good meal, that they were an audience more desirable to Faulkner than all the critics in New York City. 17

But even these claims of concern about only the chosen few readers must be reinterpreted when one finds that Flannery O'Connor was not quite so nonchalant even about the best-sellers and book-club ratings; even one miserable old lady - such as the one condemned in the Faulkner story - could worry Flannery O'Connor. "One old lady who wants her heart lifted up wouldn't be so bad, but you multiply her two hundred and fifty thousand times and what you get is a book club." 18

16 Ibid.
The fact is that Flannery O'Connor's position on the relationship between the author and the reader changed over the years. "I used to think it should be possible to write for some supposed elite..." Rather, her position matured as she became aware of how to harmonize her ideas about the relationship between author and reader with her other ideas. Her earlier expressions of disdain for the reader were actually the result of her rejection of the mirror-theory of realist writing and philosophy. The context of her earlier remarks clarifies her statements. Especially in the light of her later position, one can easily see that Miss O'Connor's earlier remarks are all in the context of discussion about such writers who produce mere replicas of physical world. Her later remarks are an attempt to harmonize this rejection of mere realism with what she must have perceived as her own desire to be read. Eventually she came to be explicit: "unless the novelist has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication." At first Miss O'Connor was more concerned with the integrity of her vision; at first she was concerned with rejecting the realistic philosophy which put value on quantity of things of this world. At first she was concerned with using grotesques, grotesques which would defy materialism by

19 Ibid.

possessing value in their own grotesqueness. Later Miss O'Connor discovered that she must iron out the contradiction— that grotesques may be a useful protest against materialism but that they also can hinder communication. That is, a writer can be so concerned about the integrity of his mission, so concerned to use grotesques to awaken modern society, that he forgets to awaken modern society and to communicate with that society because his grotesques are too grotesque. Eventually Miss O'Connor insisted very strongly that the writer must communicate; she found that the notion of the writer as prophet was a necessary complement to her philosophy. Further investigation of why Miss O'Connor used the South should make this evolution of thinking clear.

The first reason why Miss O'Connor writes about the South is, as usual with her arguments, derived from psychological experience of her own consciousness. It is an argument very similar to her argument about grotesques: "I've also read that my writing would be of more worth if I abandoned the Southern rural scene and turned my attention to something less regional. This kind of comment exhibits a real blindness to the particularities of a vocation to write. The novelist cannot choose what he is able to make live." Miss O'Connor explained that this consciousness is more than merely her experience as a writer. "The things we see, hear, smell, and touch affect us long before we believe anything at all. The South impresses its image on the Southerner. . . from the moment he is able to distinguish one sound from another.
He takes it in through his ears and hears it again in his own voice; and by the time he is capable of using his imagination for fiction, he finds that his senses respond to a certain reality that he may or may not be able to tolerate." Thus, "the writer finds in time, if not at once, that he cannot proceed at all if he cuts himself off from the sights and sounds that have developed a life of their own in his senses." Experience finds man's unified personality demanding that particulars be important because they necessarily produce those inescapable sensations; man's way of learning even as a baby indicates moreover that psychologically he comes to sensations before he comes to thoughts.

When the beginning writer or the nasty critic "begins to learn that the imagination is not free, but bound," he may feel that this bondage to a certain location or kind of specific detail is a limitation that prevents the writer from reaching any more important universal. He may feel that Flannery O'Connor is contradicting her own injunctions against local color and that "the first thing they [writers] must do in order to get at the spiritual is to shake off the clutch of mere circumstance. They would like to set their works in a region that seems nearer the spirit of their abstract judgement."21

22 Ibid.
Flannery O'Connor argues, however, that such fidelity to region does not stunt the imagination: "I'm pleased to be a member of my particular family and to live in Baldwin County in the sovereign State of Georgia, and to see what I can see from here. Where I am seems to me a great base for the imagination." The writer in Georgia "is particularly blessed in having about him a collection of goods and evils which are intensely stimulating to the imagination." Further, this paper has already seen at length Flannery O'Connor's arguments about how the unity of the human personality indicates that imagination operates well only when used with a balanced reason. As a novelist Miss O'Connor makes use of this principle not only in the characters and themes about which she writes, but also in her technique of regionalism. Even the writer who favors "a region nearer the spirit," therefore, should entertain the notion that "distinctions of belief create distinction of habit, and distinctions of habit make for distinctions of feeling. You don't believe on one side of your head and feel on the other." Furthermore, Flannery O'Connor argues that fidelity to one's region is more than a necessity shown by possibly erroneous experience; it is a philosophic necessity. Certainly, exclusive

concern with region breeds faulty local-color stories about the sham South"\textsuperscript{26} and writing that is not really fiction but is merely advertising or a sociologist's survey.\textsuperscript{27} But writing that neglects the physical region for "a region nearer the spirit" violates the nature of fiction also, because it imperils the balance between reason and feeling, "the balance between principle and fact, between judgement and observation, which is so necessary to maintain if fiction is to be true. The isolated imagination is easily corrupted by theory, but the writer inside his community seldom has such a problem."\textsuperscript{28} The writer who realizes the need to communicate, the writer who realizes that communication demands the creating of materials common to his audience, seldom has the problem of wandering off into the realms of mere abstract theory. Flannery O'Connor agrees with Evelyn Waugh that such a stress on the general detached from the particular is not fiction but philosophy.\textsuperscript{29}

Finally, Flannery O'Connor argues that while fidelity to one's region may become odious if done poorly, it actually ought to operate like all limitations and produce a good; "this discovery of being bound through the senses to a particular society

\textsuperscript{26}O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 34.  
\textsuperscript{27}O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 161.  
\textsuperscript{28}O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 32.  
\textsuperscript{29}O'Connor, "Off The Cuff," 72.
and a particular history, to particular sounds and particular idiom is for the writer, wherever he may be, the beginning of a recognition that first puts his work in real, human perspective for him. Again, as evidence that Miss O'Connor's earlier disdain for an audience has been replaced by the more mature realization that audience and realistic detail are proper though not exclusive concerns for the writer, Miss O'Connor's statement at Wesleyan College sets to rest any notion that she sought in her own writing mere regionalism, mere sensationalism, or any avoidance of universal issues: "Well I don't know how either Eudora Welty or Faulkner looks at it. I only know how I look at it and I don't feel that I am writing about the community at all. I feel that I am taking things in the community that I can show to the whole western world, the whole edition of the present generation of people, of what I can use of the Southern situation." Flannery O'Connor does not feel that her stress on region makes her a regional writer. A writer who is faithful to his region gets a "human perspective" because he has a full human personality in view, reason and emotions, general and particular, universal man and regional man, writer and reader.

In praising Marion Montgomery's *The Wandering of Desire*, Flannery O'Connor said that the Southern writer has two advantages

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a sense of history and the Bible. 32

Southern sense of history - continuity of experience, old roots, the traditional code of manners - helps the Southern novelist directly with the ability to communicate universals. "Unless the novelist has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication and communication suggests talking inside a community. One of the reasons Southern fiction thrives is that our best writers are able to do this. They are not alienated, they are not lonely suffering artists gasping for purer air. The Southern writer apparently feels the need of expatriation less than other writers of this country. "The best American fiction has always been regional. The ascendancy passed roughly from New England to the Midwest to the South; it has passed to and stayed longest wherever there has been a shared past, a sense of alikeness and a possibility of reading a small history in a universal light." 33 The word "universal" or "general" means that some characteristic is recognized as being true of a group. Southern novelists have an advantage because they have a group - themselves and their South - of which qualities can be predicated. The notion of "groups" of writers, however, needs careful description.

In the world in general, these are times when writers in this country can't very well speak for one another. In the twenties, there were poets at Vanderbilt University who felt enough kinship with each other's ideas to issue a pamphlet called I'll Take My Stand; and in the thirties, there were writers whose social consciousness set them all going in more or less the same direction. Yet today there are no good writers bound even loosely together who would be so bold as to say they speak for a generation or for each other. Today each writer speaks for himself, even though he may not be sure that his work is important enough to justify his doing so."  

Today in the United States "there are no genuine schools in American letters"; what appears to be genuine schools usually results from the fact that "there is always some critic who has just invented one a literary school, and who is ready to put you into it." "In our fractured culture, we cannot agree on morals, we cannot even agree that moral matters should become literary ones when there is a conflict between them."  

New Englanders flourished in American literature

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because at one time they possessed such a genuine shared outlook on life. Catholic authors, if they are true to themselves and their beliefs, have the same advantage of shared cultural heritage. The way Flannery O'Connor's stories dwell on the clannishness of the culture of the Negroes and of the Polish displaced persons is probably another illustration of her belief in the values of a shared culture. Miss O'Connor believes that writers who write from a shared culture have an advantage, and she believes that few authors today possess such an advantage. Miss O'Connor's statements are not to be taken quite so absolutely as she seems to imply, however. "In these things the South still has a degree of advantage. It is a slight degree and getting slighter, but it is a degree of kind as well as an intensity, and it is enough to feed great literature if our people - whether they be newcomers or have roots here - are enough aware of it to foster its growth in themselves." Southern writers have a dwindling advantage because the South is changing, but the old South is still present, as Flannery O'Connor can see in a story told by "a friend from Wisconsin who moved to Atlanta recently and was sold a house in the suburbs. The man who sold it to her was himself from Massachusetts and he recommended the property by saying 'You'll like this neighborhood. There's not a Southerner for two miles.'
At least we can still be identified when we do occur."  

36 I hate to think that in twenty years Southern writers too may be writing about men in grey flannel suits and may have lost their ability to see that these gentlemen are even greater freaks than what we are writing about now. I hate to think of the day when Southern writer will satisfy the tired reader."  

37 Though the advantage is dwindling as the South changes, the Southern writer has an advantage in a shared cultural heritage which presents writer and audience with a set of shared ideals that are universals. Without such tradition-universals built in to particulars in the pattern of his way of looking at life the Southern author would have a harder time making from these particulars the true art that unites particular and general.

Southern sense of history does more than insure that the universal is united with the particular in the consciousness of


38 It is for this reason that Flannery O'Connor would really urge the writer to be concerned with a few good readers. The writer cannot check on many readers, but when he does what he can in observing the reactions of a few, the Southern writer can verify that his work blends general and particular well, as Flannery O'Connor has already shown any art must. Since the Southern reader is attuned by culture to the general-particular consciousness, his intuition about whether the work is good or bad is usually (if he is a good reader, etc.) reliable. Thus, "I wouldn't want to suggest that the Georgia writer had the unanimous collective ear of his community, but only that his true audience, the audience he checks himself by, is at home" (O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 33).
southern reader and writer; it also generates this same pattern as the subject matter of any writer who is faithful to his southern region. The Southerner, therefore, has another advantage because writing that is about Southern particulars, if it is true to itself, will tend to be writing about the particular-general which is the unique possession of Southern culture. When a writer treats a topic that has its own universals, he does not have to labor to inject universals that remove the story from the category of opinion-survey or local color. The culture that sees reality in dimensions more than merely material provides for a writer a natural base for the kind of writing that is not concerned with the purely material, the kind of writing that is not mere opinion-survey but is really literature. Flannery O'Connor agrees with Louis Rubin that the firm ideals, the traditions, and even the firm speech mannerisms or literary "idioms"39 of the South "somehow does make possible a meaningful, broader reading

39"There is another reason in the Southern situation that makes for a tendency toward the grotesque. And this is the prevalence of good Southern writers. I think the writer is initially set going by literature more than by life. When there are many writers all employing the same idiom, all looking out on more or less the same social scene, the individual writer will have to be more than ever careful that he isn't just doing badly what has already been done to completion" (O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Literature," 276).
that people give it.** Southern sense of history gives a framework against which actions in a story can be judged, a framework from which one can make generalizations, even in an age that does not share common generalizations about life.

A study of Flannery O'Connor's use of the word "manners" provides added support to this reasoning. Some confusion arises here because Miss O'Connor uses the word "manners" in two different ways - as typical action of a group (Mannerizations) and as etiquette (e.g., in the same sense as the expression "tablemanners," etc.). To say with Flannery O'Connor that Southern manners show the South as having manners, therefore, is not to utter the redundancy that it seems.

"Manners" means the typical action of a group. Thus, what "the writer is concerned with in the most objective way is, of course, the region that most immediately surrounds him, or simply the country with its body of manners." In this sense, every region should have its manners, though the South gives the writer the advantage by being more homogeneous. But Flannery O'Connor uses "manners" in the discussion at Wesleyan College in the sense that the group has not only shared ways of acting but shared standards for evaluating actions. The following observation shows Miss O'Connor's shifting from one use of "manners" to the other;

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"Manners are of such great consequence to the novelist that any kind will do. Bad manners are better than no manners at all." The novelist must have manners, the particulars of a region. Manners as good or as bad - manners as standards for judgement - are the main value of manners (in the sense of typical actions) to writers. Thus, the South, with its firm and distinct manners, is very good because it gives writers this standard against which they can make their authorial judgements. Etiquette manners (the ideal, universal) serving as mannerization manners (the characteristic detail, the particular) make the South an attractive topic because then the particular is framed against the universal.

Miss O'Connor goes into detail about the etiquette-manners of the South. The South's sense of history - its etiquette-manners - stems from the Civil War.

After the Civil War, formality became a condition of survival. This doesn't seem to be any less true today. Formality preserves that individual privacy which everybody needs and, in these times, is always in danger of losing. It's particularly necessary to have in order to protect the rights of both races. When you have a code of manners based on charity, then when charity fails - as it is going to do constantly - you've got those manners there to preserve each race from small intrusions upon the other.

The South has survived in the past because its manners, however lopsided or inadequate they might have been, provided enough social discipline

to hold us together and give us an identity. Now those old manners are obsolete, but the new manners will have to be based on what was best in the old ones - in their real basis of charity and necessity - because "the South has to allow a way of life in which the two races can live together with mutual forbearance." This mutual living together "can't be done without a code of manners based on mutual charity."\(^{42}\) because "Manners are the next best thing to Christian charity. I don't know how much pure unadulterated Christian charity can be mustered in the South, but I have confidence that the manners of both races will show through in the long run."\(^{43}\) Good etiquette as a parallel for Christian unity is an especially important attribute for Flannery O'Connor's "region" to have, in light of the fact that this loving unity of all is the ultimate goal of her philosophy; the South, therefore, provides Miss O'Connor with the region she needs. And in general Flannery O'Connor feels that the South's possession of firm universal traits provides any artist with healthful assistance in showing art's characteristic general-in-the-particular.

The fact that "the South has a sacramental view of life"\(^{44}\) pervades the consciousness of the writer with a desire to find matter so effectively wedded to spirit that the two form a unified "sacramental" or "incarnationalist" whole; this same


sacramental view also provides the artist with a topic against which he can compare characters and make a valuation in stories.

The Southern sense of form and ideal, however, is only one of the two advantages the South offers an artist. The writer is helped because the Southern sense of etiquette-manners necessitated by the losing of the Civil War produced mannerizations. "Not every lost war would have this effect on every society but we were doubly blessed, not only in our Fall, but in having a means to interpret it. Behind our own history, deepening it at every point, has been another history. Mencken called the South the Bible Belt, in scorn and thus in incredible innocence."45 "The

45 O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 35. One should also note the previously discussed use of the Civil War and the resulting manners that replace lack of charity, p.131. It was seen that these matters are for Flannery O'Connor a reason why especially Southern writers have developed that sense of human limitedness and evil that leads to mystery and an acceptable philosophy of life and art. Miss O'Connor uses a typical Biblical symbol to express her feeling of what Southerness does for a writer: "when Walker Percy won the National Book Award, newsmen asked him why there were so many good Southern writers and he said, 'because we lost the War.' He didn't mean by that simply that a lost war makes good subject matter. What he was saying was that we have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence - as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of the country." Miss O'Connor then goes on to point out that the Bible supplies a means for interpreting this "Fall." Thus Flannery O'Connor ably illustrates how the Bible and the South both aid the novelist (O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 35).
The fact that the Bible is a pervading influence in the south has given Southern writers an advantage in several ways. Flannery O'Connor's most succinct statement about Biblical influence lists three somewhat interlocking areas wherein the Bible influences Southern writers in general and herself in particular. The Bible is an influence in technique, especially in conditioning the writer to think in concrete terms. It influences subject matter, especially as it gives dignity to the grotesque. It gives the writer a frame of reference. The following discussion of Flannery O'Connor's practice will continue examining the effect on her of the South by studying the Biblical influence and Flannery O'Connor's own further accomplishments in each of these three indicated areas: concrete particulars (including wording), subject matter, and frame of reference.

The first and third of these areas, the use of concrete detail and of the judgement frame, inter-relate so closely that they must be treated together. Miss O'Connor outlined the scope of the argument in reply to Louis Rubin's observation that "Southerners do and did read the Bible a great deal." She agrees that although the Bible influences the Southern writer's use of

words, "more than the language it seems to me it is simply the concrete, the business of being a story teller. I have Boston cousins that when they come South they discuss problems, they don't tell stories. We tell stories." The use of the concrete detail, which Hicks had found Flannery O'Connor cite as one of the Biblical influences, is here viewed as allied with a "feeling for language" and is defined as "the business of being a story teller." Students wondering why good writers come from the South were told that one reason was that the South had a tradition of telling short stories. Southern writers are "so good" because "the South is a story-telling section. The Southerner knows he can do more justice to reality by telling a story than he can by discussing problems or proposing abstractions. We live in a complex region and you have to tell stories if you want to be any way truthful about it." Such a statement raises the issue of what is seen to be the unique function of the fiction writer - whether his function is "simply the recounting of a good story" or not. Flannery O'Connor's statement "I'm not out to battle the world or reform it" should probably be taken in context

49 O'Connor, "Resurrection In August," 18.
as a disclaimer against "purely affirmative" writing and as an attempt to emphasize the value of concrete details, and not as a statement somehow denying that good literature makes value judgments about life. Just previous to this statement, for example, she had admitted that the novelist aims for more than mere amusement when she observed that "you have to get the writer's view by looking at the novel as a whole." Again, she observes that "there was a time when the average reader read a novel simply for morals he could get out of it and however naive that may have been, it was a good deal less naive than some of the more limited objectives he now has." Miss O'Connor attacked the notion that eighth graders should read "Faulkner, Hemmingway, Steinbeck, Warren and people like that." She felt that although "it is probably better to read Faulkner in eighth grade than nothing... it seems sort of insulting to Faulkner" because such writing as his is "not fare for the eighth grade. It takes experience to read modern fiction, literary experience and moral experience both, and they don't have it at that age and stage." This argument, especially the notion of needing moral experience, is absurd unless Flannery O'Connor believes that the novelist is supposed to do more than

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merely tell a story, that the novelist is to make a moral judgement, a "judgement on the value of ... feeling." Miss O'Connor makes her reasoning even more explicit when she says that having an eighth grader read such advanced modern fiction will cause "the moral problem" to "arise. It is one thing for a child to read about adultery in the Bible or in Anna Karenina and quite another for him to read about it in most modern fiction. The difficulty for the eighth grader is his lack of moral experience, his lack of a judgement-framework for what he reads. The difficulty for this eighth grader is that in the former two books, "adultery is considered a sin," and in most modern writing it is considered "at most an inconvenience." Modern writing, therefore, demands a moral maturity on the part of the reader; otherwise the reader is likely to become confused by the moral judgments implicit in modern novels. Miss O'Connor obviously believes that modern novelists are doing more than telling stories; they are making moral judgements, making their "position ... transparent in fiction." Flannery O'Connor does not accept Waugh's "rejection of a prophetic function for the writer. It


seems to me that prophetic insight is a quality of the imagination and that Waugh is as prophetic in this sense as the next one. There is the prophetic sense of 'seeing through' reality and there is also the prophetic function of recalling people to known but ignored truths;"58 for Miss O'Connor the writer has a direct moral function, although "certainly none of this precludes" other additional functions and modes of operation unique to fiction, characteristic of it, and primary to it - fiction's primary concern with the concrete (from which the moral judgements eventually and secondarily evolve).59

While Flannery O'Connor comes out strongly in favor of having the abstract judgement emerge from a story, she obviously does not want the abstract to dominate. She insists that this judgement "probably will be sunk in the work but it is there because, in the good novel, judgement is not separated from vision."60 If a person wishes "to write more than a simple article . . . to write a novel . . . he would have to show, not say."61 One of the major faults of the account the Dominicans wrote about Mary Ann is that "most of it was reported, very little was

59 Ibid.
60 O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," 34.
61 O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," 82.
rendered." Miss O'Connor cites Henry James' authority that fiction must be "felt life," and she clearly follows his example in insisting that fiction characteristically make use of not only "moral sense" but also "dramatic sense." "We must stop speaking to our prospective fiction writers as if they were laggard social engineers and stop looking in their work for something obvious to heal the age." The obvious lesson is not the function of artists but of sociologists, just as didactic writing is not art but philosophy or advertising. "We should realize that if a novelist is a healer at all it will only be through his being a poet. . . . This is the beginning of vision" — of poetic vision which preaches what the prophet sees but is not preachy. The artist is blind to obvious statements and presents his views indirectly through manipulation of the details of his medium. The artist is blind to the merely material or to the obvious generalization. The poet-artist-novelist must descend into himself; "this descent into himself will at the same time be a descent into his region; it will be a descent into the darkness of the familiar," through the darkness of the merely material or the obvious generalization, "into a world where like the blind

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63 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 733.
man cured in the Gospels he sees men as if they were trees, but walking. The artist renders.

The first clue to how judgement evolves from the texture of her stories comes when Flannery O'Connor defines more clearly what she means by the typical "story" quality which the Biblical south enunciates and which this discussion of the "dramatic," "shown" characteristic of fiction implies. Fiction is not mere story; "it is not an anecdote. . . . It is not a case history. It is not a reported incident. It is none of these things because it has an extra dimension and I think this extra dimension comes about when the writer puts us in the middle of some human action and shows it as illuminated and outlined by mystery." She views a good story as one that has both a fast-moving narrative line and a "profound level of meaning." By stating that a story has a level of meaning as surface action and simultaneously a deeper meaning where mystery - Flannery O'Connor's philosophic key idea - outlines and evaluates details, Miss O'Connor suggests that symbolism acts as one factor in the judgement-frame of her stories.

Flannery O'Connor has indicated a lack of interest in symbols:

I really didn't know what a symbol was until I started reading about them. It seemed I was

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going to have to know about them if I was going to be a respectable literary person. Now I have the notion that a symbol is like an engine in a story and I usually discover when I write something in the story that is taking on more and more meaning so that as I go along, before long, that something is turning or working the story.69

Margaret Meaders reports the following similar scene when the poet R.P.T. Coffin and some college students were guests in Flannery O'Connor's home. One of the college coeds spending the evening there in conversation with Miss O'Connor and with the poet began the following dialog:

"We have been studying the symbolism of your poetry" she said a bit breathlessly but, oh, so charmingly in a manner of one poetic soul to another. "We think we know what most things represent." She named names and coupled them with meaning. Then, frowning prettily, she added, "but in the poem about the fox we couldn't ferret out what the fox himself was supposed to represent."

There was expectant silence, while most of the assembled company waited for Ultimate Truth from the horse's mouth. For one unguarded moment, Mr. Coffin's blue sea-captain eyes blazed almost wrathfully as he spat out ten short words. "My god!" The poet exclaimed, "just a fox, just an ordinary, everyday fox!" I happened to look at our hostess 70 and then found her busy disciplining the mirth that twinkled in her eyes.70

This attitude of disdain for symbolism, however, is deceptive. It stems from Flannery O'Connor's claim that she was "innocent" of critical theorizing, and it stems from the artist's disappoint-

69 O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 12.
70 Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 381.
ment in having to explain what was supposed to be clear originally. It does not stem from any general dislike for symbols or from the lack of them in her stories. The attitude, of course, reflects the fact that Flannery O'Connor did not invent symbols consciously as she performed her first act of writing. When Rubin asked her if she had to stop herself from thinking of her work in terms of symbols while she was writing, Flannery O'Connor replied "I wouldn't say so." Miss O'Connor said she "would second everything Miss Porter said" — she would second the following insight that Katherine Anne Porter gave about the way a writer uses symbolism:

Symbolism happens of its own self and it comes out of something so deep in your own consciousness and your own experience that I don't think that most writers are at all conscious of their use of symbols. I never am until I see them. They come of themselves because they belong to me and have meaning to me, but they come of themselves. I have no way of explaining them but I have a great deal of symbolism in my mystery stories because I have a very deep sense of religion, and also I have a religious training. And I suppose you don't invent symbolism. You don't say "I am going to have the flowering Judas tree stand for betrayal," but it does.

Miss O'Connor seconds and agrees with this statement just before she launches into her rather deceptive statement that she had not known what a symbol was. In short, Flannery O'Connor knows and respects symbolism despite her strange disclaimers. These

71O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 12.

72Katherine Anne Porter, "Recent Southern Fiction: A Panel Discussion," Bulletin of Wesleyan College, XLI (January 1961), 12
disclaimers also reflect a desire to keep readers from thinking that objects and details in her stories have one and only one symbolic meaning. Thus, she finds a real symbol to be "an engine . . . taking on more and more meaning" as the story progresses, and she rails against those who "approach a story as if it were a problem in algebra: find X and when they find X they can dismiss the rest of it." It is not symbolism, therefore, that Flannery O'Connor is against. Rather, she herself uses symbolism considerably; she is against people who interpret symbols too narrowly. Such people do not let a symbol expand. Such people insist on a scientific, algebraic, one-for-one approach to symbolism. That Miss O'Connor does not really reject symbolism is evident in a number of ways— including the evidence of the above analysis. Miss O'Connor shows that she deliberately uses and deliberately tries to make herself conscious of symbols (though not in her initial draft) when she remarks: "symbols you are conscious of are those that work. All during the story "Good Country People" the wooden leg is growing in importance. And thus when the Bible salesman steals it, he is stealing a great deal more than a wooden leg. Symbols are big things that knock you in the face." Certainly her very statement about not know-

73 O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 12-13

ing "what a symbol was until I started reading about them" gives a fine definition of a symbol; whether Miss O'Connor actually used the term or not is irrelevant. Also, her support of Katherine Anne Porter's notions about symbolism, especially about the flowering Judas, indicates a commitment to symbols. Her statement about how "a good story" would have to "rattle on" at its literal story level and reach "profound level of meaning" indicates the use of symbolism. To Richard Stern she wrote: "I am cheered to hear that the moths have not got into your peafowl feathers yet. I take this symbolically (sp?) to mean that my memory too is unmotheaten in your head. Your memory is unmotheaten in my head also." This light punning on symbolic heads and peafowl feathers is an obvious use of symbolism. Miss O'Connor's use of symbols gives her one more reason to insist that an object or action be given faithful literal description. "To make anyone see a thing \[In every sense of the word - literal and symbolic\], you have to say straight out what it is, you have to describe it with the greatest accuracy." "The reality of the added dimension will be judged in a work of fiction by the truthfulness and wholeness of the literal level of the natural


events presented.78 Flannery O'Connor is observing the traditional definition of a symbol: an object or detail in a story which has its own literal meaning and which has deeper and expanding levels of meaning also. A deeper level of meaning must on its surface "have value on the dramatic level, the level of truth recognizable by anybody"; a book of hers does not prevent people from "seeing it as a novel which does not falsify reality."79 Yet this emphasis on the surface veracity does not remove symbolism; it creates symbolism rather than mere allegory. Flannery O'Connor uses the reality if not the label of symbolism.

In view of her "incarnationalist" philosophy, moreover, Flannery O'Connor would hardly be consistent unless she used symbolism frequently. If reality must be viewed as having a dual aspect of spiritual-in-material in one being expanding into unity with all that is, a detail in a story would likely have to consist of this same material or surface meaning woven outwards and expanding into deeper and subtler abstract meanings.

Since Flannery O'Connor frequently invoked the example of Hawthorne as a writer similar to herself, she could not easily escape from being influenced by at least some of his symbolism. Thus she quotes with approval Hawthorne's interpretation of the "Birthmark" as a symbol of all imperfection, and the story of

Hawthorne's daughter and Mary Ann as "standing for all grotesquerie."

She more explicitly confirms her use of Hawthorne's symbolism when she says: "I think I would admit to writing what Hawthorne called 'romances.' . . . I feel more of a kinship with Hawthorne than with any other American writer." 81 Though she hopes to have her details more literally acceptable than are some of Hawthorne's, she admits that she writes "'tales' in the sense Hawthorne wrote tales - though I hope with less reliance on allegory." 82

Further evidence that Miss O'Connor used symbols as one of her main techniques for delivering meaning comes from a study of her use of the word "myth."Apparently symbolism and myth were a technique which Miss O'Connor borrowed from the Bible - one more aspect of the Biblical influence of her stories. "Southern culture has fostered a type of imagination that has been


81 O'Connor, Letter to John Hawkes, 395. Miss O'Connor makes explicit reference to her conscious use of symbolism, to her view that an incarnationalist philosophy demands a symbolistic writer, and to her debt to Hawthorne when she says: "the Southern writer is forced from all sides to make his gaze extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that realm which is the concern of prophets and poets. When Hawthorne said that he wrote romances, he was attempting in effect to keep for fiction some of its freedom from social determinism and to steer it in the direction of poetry. I think this tradition of the dark and divisive romance-novel is combined with the comic-grotesque tradition and with the lessons all writers have learned from the naturalists . . . ." (O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Literature," 276).

influenced by Christianity of a not too unorthodox kind and by a strong devotion to the Bible which has kept all minds attached to the concrete and living symbol.\textsuperscript{83} In fact, the Bible is one of the things which gives Southern writers an advantage not only by posing as a model of technique, a model of symbolism, but also by giving Southerners that shared culture which provides a judgement frame for the artist's values. "The Bible is what we share with all Christians, and the Old Testament we share with all Jews. This is sacred history and our mythic background. If we are going to discard all this we had better quit writing at all."\textsuperscript{84} Since the Bible is generally familiar to Southern environment, it gives "the novelist that broad mythical base to refer to that he needs to extend his meaning in depth."\textsuperscript{85} The writers in "The Partridge Festival" discuss this Biblical influence in mythic technique. They find Singleton "a Christ-figure . . . . I mean as myth . . . . I'm not a Christian."\textsuperscript{86}

Flannery O'Connor, therefore, uses symbolism and its flowing expansion into myth - a technique learned from the Bible through Southern culture - and Biblical allusions as a frame of reference for organizing symbolic interpretation. Such depth

\textsuperscript{83} O'Connor, in Fitzgerald's "Introduction," xxiii-xxiv.
\textsuperscript{84} O'Connor, "Off The Cuff," 5.
\textsuperscript{85} O'Connor, cited in Hyman's Flannery O'Connor, 40.
\textsuperscript{86} O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," 82.
meaning provides her with part of the judgement-frame for her novels.

Symbolic groupings and Biblical allusions allow the reader to see how the forces of conflict are aligned in a story, but they do not reveal the author's final evaluation by indicating which of the many forces the author endorses and to what extent. Biblical allusions may provide a frame of reference; a frame for judgement is needed. Flannery O'Connor's symbolism and myths act as one of the agents delivering the author's judgement. The thesis of Robert McCown's study of *The Violent Bear It Away* in the *Kansas Magazine*, a criticism which received Flannery O'Connor's fullest endorsement,⁸⁷ is that Flannery O'Connor is not understood because she uses character symbols. Readers are confused by the fact that the characters have passionate life and reality on their own level (as opposed to allegory, which has only the deeper level), and they have a deeper symbolic meaning. In a final moment of truth, Flannery O'Connor gathers and fuses the book's symbols and reveals her judgement by indicating which character emerges successfully (more or less) from the conflict. It is not unusual for an author to use outcome of the conflict to show his evaluation — to indicate which attitude he favors and to what degree, openly or subtly. What readers must perceive in Flannery O'Connor is that when a character emerges with success,

all the values symbolically grouped with him (or with the successful aspect of him) are endorsed. This study has been examining how symbolism is present in Flannery O'Connor's fiction. McCown's analysis and Flannery O'Connor's approval of McCown's analysis indicate not only that this symbolism is present, especially in characters, but also that the author's evaluation of the groupings of symbolic levels of meaning is revealed in the outcome of the conflict. This point is important enough to be repeated more clearly for emphasis: when Miss O'Connor endorsed McCown's article she, practically speaking, delivered a directive to her critics. In light of her endorsement of McCown's article as one that "seemed to understand everything I did about the book," the reader is given a clear indication of where to find the value-judgements in Flannery O'Connor's stories. Symbols and allusions indicate for the reader which forces are united as being on one or another side of a story's conflict. McCown's article indicates that Miss O'Connor wishes the reader to discover her judgements by observing which character is successful in the conflict and then by realizing that this character is symbolic of all the other elements with which he has been symbolically united in the conflict.

88 Ibid., 71.
Flannery O'Connor promotes quite a few levels of symbolic grouping. The writer's extra dimension must include the "moral and allegorical and anagogical levels of meanings... in the literal level of his work"\(^89\) -- 'like the medieval commentators on scripture, who found three kinds of meaning in the literal level of the sacred text"\(^90\) (for a total of four levels of meaning). This is quite an important aspect of Flannery O'Connor's technique, hitherto examined by none of the critics. Medieval Biblical exegesis and criticism of secular literature made great use of these four levels of interpretation. The four levels can be illustrated as follows. "Jerusalem is literally a city in Palestine, allegorically the Church, morally the believing soul, anagogically the heavenly Jerusalem."\(^91\) Flannery O'Connor indicates her use of the four-levels, although she does not use the terms here, when she asserts that a fiction writer has not one "true country" but four. The word "Country" suggests

"everything from the actual countryside that the novelist describes, on, to, and through the peculiar characteristics of his region and his nation, and on, through and under all of these to his true country, which the writer with Christian convictions will consider to be what is eternal and absolute. This covers considerable territory, and if one were talking of any other kind of writing than the writing of fiction, one


would perhaps have to say "countries" but it is the peculiar burden of the fiction writer that he has to make one country do for all and that he has to evoke that one country through the concrete particulars of a life that he can believe.92

Miss O'Connor here shows that she uses the notion 'country' symbolically - it is one term which has to sum up a plural - and that she uses it symbolically on four levels. Her interpretation of her meaning of the term shows the four different levels, shows that the four-level symbolism occurs in her expository writing as well as her fiction.

Flannery O'Connor's use of these four levels mean that her stories, besides her literal level of meaning, should be interpreted simultaneously to refer to philosophical or theological beliefs (allegory), to what action an individual should perform (the moral sense), and to what ideal or perfect goals Flannery O'Connor urges for human actions (Christ, the end of time in heaven, the perfect person even now). Her stories wait for some critic to make this four-fold application. A close study of the medieval theory of the four senses of interpretation would probably shed much light on other aspects of Flannery O'Connor's literary theory. For example, Beryl Smalley observed as follows:

"Etymologies were more helpful even than numbers in exegesis. The conception went back to primitive word-magic. Hence, Philo believes

that a Biblical name is a perfect description of the thing;" ... with Moses the names assigned are manifested images of the things, so that name and thing are inevitably the same from the first and the name and that to which the name is given differ not a whit ... ." Then, closely connected with its etymology, is the description of the thing. Its special characteristics determine what it signifies.

Flannery O'Connor's care in selecting the names of characters and her many word-puns are brought to mind by the way the four-levels of interpretation stresses names and etymologies. Dante, whom Flannery O'Connor cites as a model, wrote letters about how he consciously wrought these four levels in *The Divine Comedy*. William Troy connects the four-levels approach with modern emphasis on myth - which Flanner O'Connor had mentioned as important in finding a frame of reference for a story.

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95 "What is possibly most in order at the moment is a thorough-going refurbishment of the medieval four-fold method of interpretation, which was first developed, it will be recalled, for just such a purpose - to make at least partially available to the reason that complex of human problems which are imbedded, deep and imponderable, in the Myth.

*Littera gesta docet, quae credas Allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas Anagogia.*

Of these four levels of meaning, surely the most important for us today is the last, the anagogical, which teaches us 'whither we may turn ourselves.' For it should be implicit in this footnote that if we are to be saved, which also assumes that we wish to be saved, it can only be through some reintegration of the Myth in terms of heartbreaking concerns of the times" (William Troy, "Myth, Method, and the Future," *Chimera*, IV (Spring, 1946), 83).
Miss O'Connor so profoundly uses the four-level approach that she defines the difficulty of modern writers and of modern society in terms of the four-senses: "For the modern reader, moral distinctions are usually blurred in hazes of compassion; there are not enough common beliefs to make this a fit age for allegory; and as for anagogical realities, they either don't exist at all for the general reader or are taken by him to be knowable by sensation [i.e., by knowledge of the merely material]." So basic is the four-senses approach to Miss O'Connor's craftsmanship that she must use it to define her ideas about how modern society separates reason and feeling, or tries to ignore the limits of matter.

Systematic investigation of the four-levels of interpretation or application of its theories is beyond the scope of the present study. Clearly Flannery O'Connor considered the matter important enough to be mentioned on several occasions. Her emphasis on these four levels of meaning provides abundant proof that she deliberately intended not to reject symbolism in her stories or theory - and proof of how lightly her disclaimers of symbolism should be taken. This four-levels approach, if carefully applied to her stories, could be the weapon that would settle arguments about whether or not an object or action in her stories is to have a religious and even Christian theological meaning or not. Presumably Flannery O'Connor as a craftsman

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using this four-level approach, would say that the religious or theological meanings are present, but that there are enough other possible layers of meaning present so that the truth of her writing can be clear even to one who does not share her Christian theology. Thus, when Miss O'Connor indicates that fiction writers have four true countries, she sums up what has so far been seen to be her primary literary technique symbolism.

A second device by which Flannery O'Connor's judgements evolve from details of her stories is the shifting point of view and the manipulation of language. Flannery O'Connor is aware of the need for controlled point of view. The young fiction writer is advised to "begin with the outside and when you have the outside established, then you can go into the person's head. But don't go into the heads of people you don't know anything about and have them think with your words and not with their own."\(^{97}\) This paper has already seen how Miss O'Connor insists that fiction be rendered. Yet Caroline Gordon, one of Miss O'Connor's first admirers, complains that Miss O'Connor has not solved an author's first problem - the problem of narrational authority. Other critics also complain that Miss O'Connor has no norm, that her point of view is so mysterious that the reader cannot determine what Miss O'Connor favors, that Miss O'Connor's

\(^{97}\text{O'Connor, "My Mentor, Flannery O'Connor," 24.}
stories lack efficient consistency in point of view for the reader to grasp the author's evaluation. For example, even her executor Robert Fitzgerald notes that Miss O'Connor had difficulty learning "when not to use a kind of indirect discourse in the country idiom she loved" - because when she wove a character's thoughts and words with her own, the reader could not separate the author's own point of view from that of the characters. 98 Fitzgerald

98 A number of important critics have adversely criticized Flannery O'Connor's use of point of view. For example, Caroline Gordon complains that Flannery O'Connor's lapses are from reluctance or inability "to solve the first problem of any fiction writer - to determine on whose authority the story is to be told." The problem according to Gordon is that the omniscient narrator "often speaks like a Georgia 'cracker.'" Gordon recognizes that Flannery O'Connor's use of the shifting point of view may be deliberate. Gordon recognizes that perhaps Miss O'Connor is using style rather than the mind of some particular character as the anchored point of view in the story. Gordon continues "but it is perhaps captious to apply such a standard [the standard of demanding a fixed point of view in the mind of some character] for O'Connor's prose, which is, in her hand, a subtle and powerful instrument with which she has achieved effects produced by no other writer of her generation" (Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, "Commentary on Capote and O'Connor," The House of Fiction, 2nd ed. [New York: Scribner, 1969], p. 384). Miss Gordon's remarks have a special weight because she was a close friend and literary adviser of Flannery O'Connor.

Along a similar line Robert Fitzgerald reports of Flannery O'Connor's reaction when she submitted Wise Blood, her first novel, to Caroline Gordon for her criticism before the novel was published. One of Gordon's main points was that the narrator's style should be "more consistently distinct from the style of the characters, and I believe that Flannery saw the rightness of this and learned quickly when and where not to a kind of indirect discourse in the country idiom she loved" (Robert Fitzgerald, "Introduction," XVIII). That Flannery O'Connor did not consider the shifting point of view a mistake to be corrected in either Wise Blood or in her later stories is evidenced by the fact that she continued using this shifting point of view throughout all her later stories. She was deliberately attempting to gain some specific effect in this way.
claims, however, that the problem of her point of view was brought to Miss O'Connor's attention and that she satisfactorily corrected the problem. There is no doubt that the issue of point of view was at the forefront of Miss O'Connor's thoughts. In the same context where she regrets the way the Dominicans failed to render Mary Ann, Flannery O'Connor indicates briefly why she continued to have a fluid point of view - why she continued to intermingle her words with those of her characters. The Dominicans erred, Miss O'Connor claimed because in their account most of the material "was reported, very little was rendered; at the dramatic moment - when there was one - the observer seemed to fade away,

Other critics have also noted and condemned Flannery O'Connor's shifting point of view. Creekmore complains that form is lacking in her stories. He complains that there is no norm; no characters accept Christianity or present the orthodox point of view. Creekmore obviously has not considered the possibility advanced by Caroline Gordon - that Flannery O'Connor's stable point of view is maintained by her exact style and by the carefulness in her wording (syllables, patterns of connotation, etc.). Because of the shifting point of view, Creekmore cannot figure out a way through O'Connor's "complexities about prophecy and baptism." He feels that he does not know "what she is driving at" (Hubert S. Creekmore, "Southern Baptism," The New Leader, May 30, 1960, 21). Ballif finds that The Violent Bear It Away does not persuade the reader to suspend disbelief because Kafka-like fantasies are assimilated and treated as if they were ordinary and even banal. Flannery O'Connor's fantasies are too abrupt and too naked, "too literally from the realm of the conscious." Ballif finds, therefore, that Flannery O'Connor has not sufficiently distinguished between the narrator's point of view and the random thoughts of the character; Ballif cannot thus find his way through the random thoughts of the basic meaning of Flannery O'Connor's stories, because he cannot determine her exact point of view (Algene Ballif, "A Southern Allegory, - The Violent Bear It Away, by Flannery O'Connor," Commentary, XXX 2960, 361).
and where the exact word or phrase was needed, a vague one was used. 99 Flannery O'Connor is not interested in having the reader always able to distinguish between the writer's voice and the character's voice. She would have the narrator present at the dramatically significant moment — present with an "exact word." Authorial evaluation can come from the connotations of wording, from a significant adjective, etc., as a narrator—observer reports action. Flannery O'Connor feels that the author's judgement-frame is present in a story by virtue of who wins the conflict; the author's judgement-frame is also present making the author's evaluations clear in the use of the exact word, in patterns built up by repetition in a story's context. She does not feel that it is always necessary for the reader to have a separate ideal character or the separate voice of the author as a standard against which actions in the story are to be judged. Judgement can come in these other ways. Robert Fitzgerald points to the following example from "The Artificial Nigger": "the trees were full of silver-white sunlight, and even the meanest of them sparkled." "Meanest and sparkle," he finds, are telling words that indicate the direction of the author's sympathies and therefore are her evaluations of her particular detail and of items symbolically connected with it. 100

100 Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xi.
Evidently, then, Flannery O'Connor felt that shadings of the exact word, shadings of connotation, were sufficient for allowing the astute reader to determine what the author's judgements were. A careful study of the "exact word" will reveal what factors Flannery O'Connor's authorial judgement favors. Since direct intrusions by the author diminish the "rendering" of a story, and since the author can get her evaluation known by a patterned repetition of properly connotative words, Flannery O'Connor felt that there was no defect in her use of the shifting point of view. She felt that there was no need for her to intrude in her own person as an objective standard against whom the action in the story could be judged. At any one time a reader is not sure of whether a particular word or comment with a "loaded" connotation is a view of the author or of a particular character. But as the reader moves on through a full story he observes a pattern of the "loaded" connotations, a pattern that must come from the author-producer rather than from some one character. Thus the reader must determine the author's judgement in the light of the total pattern of such telling expressions in a story.

The "exact word" has another use in Miss O'Connor's stories. Flannery O'Connor was quite concerned with getting shades of wording that exactly suited the texture of a story. Thus, she called for no "useless bricks" in stories; reason had to govern every detail. She seemed to favor wording that was very simple
and direct; "don't get poetic when you are writing prose. Don't even get poetic when you are writing poetry. Only bad poets are poetic." A good story comes "when you let us \( \text{the readers} \) see what you're talking about." A good writer must "be direct; not "coy." He must produce "plain straight writing with no fancy business." His "prose is \( \text{to be} \) clear and forceful," with "nothing contrived about the story."\(^{101}\) A short story "is not a lyric rhapsody in prose."\(^{102}\) Good poets do not seem "poetic" in the sense that they are not flowery and sentimentally pompous; for a good poet every word is telling. And for Flannery O'Connor the novelist is a poet.\(^{103}\) She is delighted that the students at Rosary College inquired very exactly and sharply about the reasons for details which "roosted on the very edge of her own memory." She was delighted that they had read her so closely.\(^{104}\) Her obvious delight in such minutely close reading again reveals her as one who would rather be read as a poet, one who would prefer that a reader weigh the multiple associations of each and every word, of each and every detail. Her


\(^{103}\)O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 12. See also Review of Chardin's The Phenomena of Man, 618.

\(^{104}\)Wells, "Off The Cuff," 72.
claim that the novelist is a poet was more than a statement that he was a maker that used imagination. Every word should have its particular reason for being present; like her symbols, the riddle of connotation from the "exact word" conjures a haze and expanding relationship within her story. The literary arts differ from other arts, therefore, in that for the literary artist "words ... should be an intense pleasure" in themselves. The "intense" drive of meaning and the density of relationships are another device by which Flannery O'Connor signals her authorial preference for the violent. Her stories have the tightly woven verbal texture of poems. 105 "The direction of many of us will be toward concentration and the distortion that is necessary to get our vision across; it will be toward poetry, rather than toward the traditional novel." 106 With verbal texture as with symbolism Flannery O'Connor is able to evoke many patterns of inter-relationship within her stories and to suggest multiple levels wherein details equal one another and equal the character-symbols by whom the author's judgements can also be determined. Just as a reader can determine the author's judgements by observing the winner of a conflict - the traditional method for determining authorial judgements in narratives - so the reader


can also determine authorial judgements by observing the pattern of verbal texture running through the literary work. Flannery O'Connor was careful that "where an exact word or phrase was needed, a vague one was usually not supplied." And from the intensity of these relationships the reader can determine Flannery O'Connor's authorial preferences, her authorial judgements - her preference for intenseness as the victor in her conflicts.

Another use of language to reveal patterns of meaning and judgement is aligned with this search for the "exact word": Flannery O'Connor's sentence structure. As a writer she believed that she ought to "say straight out what it is."

A good style was not a pompous "poetic" writing of bad poets but writing that "does not call undue attention to itself." She described herself as having a "one-cylinder syntax." Again there was a purpose, however, in what may have seemed a fault. Caroline Gordon felt that Flannery O'Connor was probably not a first-rank author because she did not have extended passages of purple prose. Allen Tate was wiser. He

107 O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 32
encountered Flannery O'Connor's "simple" style early in her career. That he did not succeed in correcting it as he wished when he read Flannery O'Connor's practice work at the University of Iowa and when he read the early drafts of Wise Blood is further evidence that this device of simplicity was deliberate. Again, when Louis Rubin suggested that the "Rolling feeling for language" comes through into Southern writing from the King James Bible, Flannery O'Connor for once passed up an opportunity to attribute something desirable to the Bible. She granted that the Bible influenced the language of Southern writing somewhat — but she passed quickly over the remark about the "rolling" language.112 She seemed to have felt that the directness and bluntness, the understatement, of some sections of the Bible was more important. Later Tate discovered what Flannery O'Connor was doing: "I hadn't the vaguest idea of what she was up to; I offered to correct her grammar; I even told her that her style was dull, the sentences being flat and simple declaratives. No doubt what I said was true; but it was irrelevant. The flat style, the cranky grammar, the monotonous sentence-structure were necessary vehicles of her vision of man. It was a narrow vision, but deep."113 Flannery O'Connor's "one-cylinder syntax" must therefore be another device for rendering authorial judgements. The leaness of the sentences

112 O'Connor, "Recent Southern Fiction," 11.

suggests human and material limitations, one of Flannery O'Connor's
most important motifs. The ineptness of grammar, etc., suggests
again weakness and corruption. The velocity of these short
sentences as they relentlessly drive toward their narrow goal
parallels the intensity of character that Flannery O'Connor's
philosophy favors. The reader can infer that Miss O'Connor favors
the intensity-aspect of the conflict because her own authorial
voice of righteousness contains the same relentless intensity.

Opposite to the intensity of the "one-cylinder syntax" is
Flannery O'Connor's use of the cliche as a device for revealing
her authorial attitude. Deliberate use of a cliche is Miss O'Connor's counterattack against "most readers rely on
various critical cliches to explain . . . literature that don't explain anything." These cliches are the easy way to arrive at
answers without having to use reason—or any other virtue.114

The cliche is used ironically in Miss O'Connor's stories. In
language or in life it is the opposite of Flannery O'Connor's
incarnationalist philosophy because it retains the external appearance or working but lacks the internal life or spirit which
should be united with matter. Flannery O'Connor uses the cliche
to indicate that the good of violently intense action is shifted

to a "cliche or a smoothing down that will soften . . . (Its) real
look."115 "By separating nature and grace as much as possible,"
by disjoining matter and spirit, man "has reduced his conception"
of the good from Flannery O'Connor's vision of intensity to a
"highest cliche."116 The uniqueness of person or of anything is
not something typical, and therefore man is not acting properly
if he thinks life's essence is something that can be possessed
other than by intensity, if he thinks life's essence is "something
that can become a cliche."117 When intensity is lacking and is
replaced by "second-hand emotion," the result is "all the cliches
in the book."118 Allen Tate's summary of Flannery O'Connor's
technique perhaps has the added value of Flannery O'Connor's
endorsement because of his relationship with her as a literary
guide; in any event it is the best concise summary of her practice
in this regard; "Good Country People" is only one example of the
technique when "Hulg's mother receives the Bible salesman because
he is a good country boy trying to get ahead by means of the pious
work of selling Bibles." All Flannery O'Connor's stories "exhibit,
either in the title or in the situation out of which the action
begins, a moral platitude . . . The characters speak nothing but

115 O'Connor, "Mary Ann," 35.
platitudes, and when evil has done its work with the platitudes the result is a powerful iron which, though crudely violent, is inherent in the situation, not laid on as commentary by the author. "119

Flannery O'Connor's "one-cylinder syntax" and the similar but opposite cliches - like the symbols and the fluid intimations of attitude through a judicious "exact word" - reveal Flannery O'Connor's judgements about the contents of her stories.

One more method which Flannery O'Connor uses to evolve authorial judgement from the details of the story deserves special mention here even though it is neither a method mentioned very prominently in Miss O'Connor's own critical theory nor a method illustrating the influence of the Bible's story element. This technique, irony, deserves mention because it is so frequently used in Flannery O'Connor's stories and mentioned in criticism about her. Although Miss O'Connor uses irony on many occasions,120 on only three occasions does the idea receive direct attention as a story technique, and then only briefly. In discussing the television version of her story, "The River" Flannery O'Connor regretted that "a pointed, ironical tale" had been turned into a piece of sentimental escapism. 121 Robert McCown, whose

119 Tate, "Flannery O'Connor - A Tribute," 48-49
120 For example, O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 34; "The Partridge Festival," 82.
article enjoys Miss O'Connor's direct endorsement, summarized her technique as a use of "ironic contrast" between character-symbols to reveal "spiritual value" hiding "under a cloak of foolishness." In "The Partridge Festival" the novelist "felt that if he probed sufficiently he would expose her [the girl's] essential shallowness." Because the fiction writer exposes his views in "concrete findings" rather than in mere "narrow abstractions," he uses a form different from that of the writer of non-fiction; he uses the form of the "ironical smile." Careful reading and interpretation of this passage in the short story, therefore, suggests that a characteristic mode the fiction writer uses to express his views indirectly is the ironical exposure of shallowness. Such an interpretation would explain why Flannery O'Connor did not give more direct attention to her own use of irony. Apparently she felt that she did not need the word "irony" because the idea of irony as discrepancy between appearance and reality underlay her whole philosophy of life and art. The incarnationalist view calls for the merging of appearance and reality. Irony 's the opposite of that; it is discrepancy between the matter and the spirit, the discrepancy between the appearance and reality, shallowness of mere appearance where deeper reality is insufficient or is lacking. Miss

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122 McCown, "The Education of a Prophet," 78.
O'Connor's lengthy statements about the way many writers and modern thinkers confuse appearance and reality implied that she would use the substance of irony without the word. One of her major reasons for using the grotesque was that the writer can reach modern culture only if he makes his grotesques appear as normal and if he can make what the world holds as normal "appear as distortions." "Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can been seen through each other.\(^\text{124}\)

The discriminating reader should be alert to seek deeply Flannery O'Connor's real meaning in an ironic reversal of what appears. The reader has his clue that irony is present in the obvious verbal thrusts and puns, as in the following reference from "The Enduring Chill." Julian is desperately searching for the meaning of life. He is "beating the bush" for "something \(\langle\text{that}\rangle\) amuses" or satisfies. He rejects a similar search by his mother with an obvious ironic thrust as he refers to what he thinks is an inadequate Doctor Bush:

"Bush! That beats all!"\(^\text{125}\)

Flannery O'Connor's irony is usually more profound than such a mere pun. But the puns do indicate that the reader should be searching for at least


aware of possible deeper ironies. Carl Hartman, for example, points out that Miss O'Connor's "one-cylinder syntax," her practice of saying directly and in simple language what a thing is, her shifting points of view, her excessive emphasis of strange landscapes and strange skies, her conversations that are mere cliches and uncommunicative - all these things promote a "functional artificiality" that allows the reader to be aware that Flannery O'Connor is using ironic exaggeration. Miss O'Connor feels that her use of grotesques will be just an obvious clue that the reader must translate the irony to obtain her real meaning. Miss O'Connor indicates that her views are to be learned by the reader's observing that the outer world of appearance contrasts with the inner world of reality - by irony.

Thus the Biblical mode of story-telling provides Flannery O'Connor with five major devices by which she can deliver her judgements: she uses allusion and symbolic groupings expanding through myth into open-end suggestions of four-level meaning and authorial judgement; she uses the shifting point of view to create symbol patterns that weave authorial judgement in with dramatic rendering; she uses a style of intenseness in connotation and sentence structure to suggest her authorial preference for violent characters; she uses the exploded, over-worked (and therefore unviolent) cliche; and she uses irony.

Flannery O'Connor's statement that the Bible strongly influences Southern writing indicates that the Bible influences subject matter also by the way it gives dignity to the lives of the poor and grotesque. Not much attention need be devoted to this topic because this Biblical influence is a Biblical set of "manners" which functions for a story like the Southern "manners"; southern and Biblical "manners," fixed ideals (etiquette-manners) at work in particular mannerizations, generate a topic and theme as well as provide the author with a consciousness of the universal-in-particular that constitutes art. Thus, when Flannery O'Connor or any Southern author displays characters burning with evangelical Protestantism, the reader should not feel that a religious sect is being favored or condemned. The Southern writer displays evangelical Protestantism "not because in the false superiority of his orthodoxy, he wishes to subtract one theology from another, but because, descending within himself to find his region, he discovers it is with these aspects of Southern life that he has a feeling of kinship strong enough to spur creation."  

127 Flannery O'Connor is "not interested in sects as sects: I'm concerned with the religious individual, the

backwoods prophet." Miss O'Connor chooses these characters because they provide a way in which she can avoid artificiality or strain of probability in shifting the story's conflict to the religious imagery (Biblical myth, etc. - discussed earlier) at religious and allegorical levels of meaning which she intends the story to have. "In the South belief can still be made believable and in relation to a large part of society. We're not the Bible Belt for nothing."

The critic may still wonder why, if she is not rebuking their lack of orthodoxy, Flannery O'Connor as a Catholic continues using Southern Protestant religious characters and whether she fully endorses the views of these "backwoods prophets." It has already been seen that she accepts the literary dogma that the novelist must show and not state his vision. Miss O'Connor writes about Southerners because in the South there is more concern with society - for all the various reasons seen earlier. The South expresses its tensions in a social form and not just within the individual. The novelist has an advantage when the South is his topic because if he is to show his vision it is better for him to have a topic where concern with society is primary.

129 O'Connor, cited in Hyman's Flannery O'Connor, 40
If a novelist must write of a social conflict entirely within an individual, he is in danger of writing preaching; when the tension is social, its expression between individuals is external, in action and not merely a dialect of thought.

It is for the same reason that Flannery O'Connor writes about the Protestants. Observation will indicate, Miss O'Connor claims, that when a Catholic is possessed of the intenseness desirable in Flanner O'Connor's philosophy he will withdraw from the world to a "convent." Since Protestants with the same intenseness have no such retreat, their religious actions, being social, are more readily "shown" in a novel. They remain in society, acting with others, along with their intenseness. "They express their belief in diverse kinds of dramatic action which is obvious enough for me to catch." 131 Thus, theologically, Flannery O'Connor is not really "right behind" these evangelical prophets "100 percent." She agrees that theologically such a prophet "lacks the visible church." 132 but "judgement is just as much a matter of relishing as condemning." 133 Such a prophet is desirable to her because he does possess some of the attributes which her philosophy admires. She relishes these

attributes, she portrays this prophet for the good she sees in him although theologically he may not possess full good. Thus she refers to him as "a sort of crypto-Catholic." McCown writes with Flannery O'Connor's approval that her prophets exhibit the deeper habits of faith even beneath apparent disbelief. They have the intensity which Flannery O'Connor's philosophy requires.

"Old Tarwater is not typical of the Southern Baptist, or of the Southern Methodist. Essentially he's a crypto-Catholic. When you leave a man alone with his Bible and the Holy Ghost inspires him, he's going to be a Catholic one way or another, even though he knows nothing about the visible Church. His kind of Christianity may not be socially desirable, but it will be real in the sight of God." Flannery O'Connor relishes the fact that these prophets admit the limits of matter, see the world with incarnationalist eyes, and move with intenseness. Moreover, an author can write about such a person without confusing the issue of whether he is holy or whether his sect is holy. Since Protestant tradition has the religious individual dealing directly with God, an author can show the character's religious actions - can show him "alone with his Bible" - and not have the reader puzzled about

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135 McCown, "The Education of a Prophet," 74-77

whether or not religious or social actions are being stressed. "The aspect of Protestantism that is most prominent [at least to the Catholic] in the South is that of man dealing with God directly, not through the mediation of the church, and this is great for the Catholic novelist like myself who wants to get close to his character and watch him wrestle with the Lord."137 Flannery O'Connor uses the Bible in subject matter, therefore, because she can thereby attain another frame of reference in "manners" and in myth, and because she can thereby realistically discuss the religious actions of men. Miss O'Connor emphasizes the evangelical Protestants because their "manners" are more visible and because the reader cannot mistake the fact that they are dealing with God.

Thus the Bible and the South are important influences on Flannery O'Connor. Miss O'Connor attributes much of the confusion of those who do not understand her writing to a lack of current familiarity with the Bible - among modern secularists and among Catholics whose tradition of the last several centuries has produced a non-Biblical culture. Not seeing life through the Bible is a deficiency, a deficiency in vision and a deficiency in sophistication for understanding literary techniques. However,

137 O'Connor, cited in Hyman's *Flannery O'Connor*, 40-41
Flannery O'Connor does not "think the novelist can discard the instruments he has to plumb meaning just because" men today are not sufficiently expert to understand them. "You don't write only for now. The Biblical revival is going to mean a great deal to Catholic fiction in the future. Maybe in fifty years, or a hundred, Catholics will be reading the Bible the way they should have been reading it all along. I can wait that long to have my fiction understood." One of the greatest aids for her, Flannery O'Connor feels, would be an audience more enlightened not only about the Bible and its subject matter but also about a technique learned from the Bible - the technique of fiction: "fiction is about life, and so anyone living considers himself an authority on it." But just as the parables of the Bible are not to be confused with historical events, likewise the happenings of fiction are not simply "life". Thus not everyone living is an authority on fiction, despite popular belief. "It is popular to suppose that anyone who can read the telephone book can read a short story or a novel."


140 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 735
It is, therefore, of prime importance for the careful reader to survey the techniques by which Flannery O'Connor causes her judgement to evolve from the details of her stories. Miss O'Connor's fictional techniques, influenced greatly by the South and by the Bible, include the following: (1) her emphasis on religion and "manners"; (2) symbols, shades of connotation, and biblical myth, which merge and infinitely expand layers of related meaning - especially character-symbols which emerge victorious or defeated - and the four-layered medieval exegetical method of interpretation of text; (3) shifting point of view with resulting authorial comment in patterns of connotation and in slant of "exact wording" of narrative; (4) intensity of "one-cylinder syntax" and the emptiness of cliches; and (5) ironical exaggerations and reversals of meaning.

This discussion of Flannery O'Connor's literary techniques affords at last the opportunity of seeing Miss O'Connor's philosophy of life and of art as a unified whole: the novelist is a "poet, one "whose sight is essentially prophetic." The novelist is a prophet, especially in his kind of vision. "The fiction writer should be characterized by his kind of vision, not by his function. His kind of vision is prophetic vision. . .


\[142\] O'Connor, Review of Chardin's The Phenomena of Man, 618.
In the novelist's case, it is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up." \(^{143}\) Prophetic vision requires that the novelist have a "sense of 'seeing through' reality," \(^{144}\) a sense "of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up." \(^{145}\) Chardin's prophetic ability is "a scientific expression of what the poet attempts to do: penetrate matter until spirit is revealed in it. \(^{146}\) Flannery O'Connor's thought requires that the novelist have an incarnationalist vision - a vision of matter penetrated with spirit - because only such a vision would be true to the nature of reality. The novelist must have this incarnationalist vision, moreover, because only it will satisfy the nature of fiction. "The short story writer practically has to learn to read life in a way that includes the most possibilities . . . If you see things in depth you will be more liable to write them that way." \(^{147}\) True fiction must be multi-layered or cease being art. True fiction must have its concrete details radiating with expanding meanings simultaneously true, just as a true vision of reality sees matter and especially men as pulsing with ever


\(^{144}\) O'Connor, "Off The Cuff," 72.


\(^{146}\) O'Connor, Review of Chardin's The Phenomena of Man, 618.


more complex unities of spirit harmonizing into the simultaneous unity of all being. "Of those who look for" the ultimate in life, therefore, "none get so close as the artist" because the very nature of art requires a multi-layered object simultaneously pulsing with many spirits or meanings - just as, for Flannery O'Connor, true philosophy requires a many-layered object (this world) simultaneously pulsing with many spirits, until the unity of full-being spirit subsumes all in the "evolutionary process." Thus by following the demands of his technique or of his art, the poet-novelist attains and expresses his unique vision: "the prophet is the realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that goes into great novels." "Fiction, made according to its own law . . . renews our knowledge that we live in the mystery from which we draw our abstractions." It reinforces "our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality." Art demands the incarnationalist technique just as prophecy (of which art is a branch) and a true philosophy of life demand an incarnationalist vision that can be expressed only in the incarnationalist technique of the "poet" - a poet whose

149 O'Connor, Review of Chardin's The Phenomena of Man, 618.
medium is life or at least a poet whose medium is words. The very "way to transcend" (not ignore) the limitedness of this world - the essence of prophetic vision - is to find "a form to express it in" for the novelist.\textsuperscript{152} Fiction and life must have their outward signs that are so wedded to inward meaning that these outward details not only signify but also indeed partake in and cause inward mutations on a scale vast enough to expand into the intense vitality of the ultimate what is. This is Flannery O'Connor's incarnationalism, her sacramentalism. Thus, probably the statement that best sums up Miss O'Connor's thinking in capsule form comes from one of her earlier lectures:

\begin{quote}
the Catholic sacramental view of life is one that maintain and supports at every turn the vision that story tellers must have if they are going to write fiction of any depth.
\end{quote}

The serious fiction writer will think that any story that can be entirely explained by adequate motivation of the characters or by a believable imitation of a way of life or by a proper theology will not be a large enough story to occupy himself with. This is not to say that he doesn't have to be concerned with adequate motivation or adequate reference or theology; he does but he has to be concerned with them only because the meaning of the story does not begin at a depth where these things have been exhausted. The fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of mystery which cannot be accounted for by a human formula.\textsuperscript{153}

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\textsuperscript{152} O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," 82.
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\textsuperscript{153} O'Connor, cited in Fitzgerald's "Introduction," xxiv, xxvii xxviii.
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CHAPTER FIVE

AN EXPLICATION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY: An Examination of a Novel in Terms of its Author's Philosophy of Life, Theory of Art, and Techniques of Fiction

Since Flannery O'Connors's main philosophic insight is that life and writing are a sacramental texture with several realities simultaneously occurring in appearances, this study of The Violent Bear It Away, the story which is her longest and, by her own claim,\(^1\) her most complex, will be mainly concerned with examining simultaneously-true layers of textured meaning. The main concern of the present chapter must, therefore, be to discover how the major patterns of details in the story consistently harmonize to indicate Flannery O'Connor's view on life. This chapter will be an application of Flannery O'Connor's theories, therefore, if it is a study of her sacramental or multi-dimensional details, her "symbolic" patterns in The Violent Bear It Away. The details should lead to Flannery O'Connor's judgements in the way indicated previously as her stated practice in evolving judgements, and the judgements should be consistent with Miss O'Connor's previously indicated philosophy. The present chapter thus allows the reader to see how Flannery O'Connor's theories are put into practice. The previous chapter indicated that one of Miss O'Connor's main artistic practices and techniques for delivering

\(^{1}\)O'Connor, "Off The Cuff," 71-72.
meaning was the use of symbolic patterns which the climax shows the author as favoring. Thus, the present chapter will examine Miss O'Connor's climax attitudes, practices, and patterns. Also, since critics reach contradictory conclusions about what is Flannery O'Connor's judgement especially in the interpretation of the ending of The Violent Bear It Away, the present study can best begin by examining the ending of the novel; it can then trace the significance of the symbolic patterns which climax in that ending.

The outcome of the story is assured only on the second last page when Tarwater's "hands opened stiffly as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all his life." Previous to this time Tarwater is still resisting his calling to follow Old Tarwater. At least Tarwater's eyes are still avoiding Old Tarwater's grave; Tarwater can still be enticed by hearing the "stranger's" temptation luring Tarwater to live alone at Powderhead and not bother with Old Tarwater's orders that Tarwater must convert others; and Tarwater can hope to satisfy only himself (rather than realizing that he must live for others) by eating with Buford and rejecting Buford's reproachful gaze with the same belligerence with which he had rejected the words of the woman.

\[2\text{See above, pp. 25-6 where the views of these many critics are cataloged and compared.}\]
from whom he had tried to buy pop. The whole novel has been the story, often told through flashbacks, about how Tarwater spent his life since the time of his being "born in a wreck." Previously he has been shown to be in conflict, vacillating between his desire to be free from Old Tarwater's religious heritage and his duty to follow the way of the prophet. Here, however, as he finally brings himself to look at Old Tarwater's grave and therefore moves his hands to gesture that he is "dropping something he had been clutching all his life," Tarwater is shown to be decisively undertaking to channel the direction of his life. The time of indecision is ended. The climax for the whole sequence of events in the novel has been reached.

Critics who complain that Flannery O'Connor ends The Violent Bear It Away with confusion are stunned by what seems to be Tarwater's sudden conversion two pages before the end of the story. It is, they say, a confusing novel that shows its protagonist heading consistently in one direction only to change to the exact opposite direction at the very end, in a final two page "addition," without forewarning. If the story were not judged to be confusing, it would at least merit the charge of Flannery O'Connor's other hostile critics - that its pessimistic determinism loses the reader's empathy because it does not show the real world. In other words, if Tarwater is changed to the exact opposite type of character in the last two pages of the story, he

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changes either because he cannot escape the way he has been conditioned by Old Tarwater or because he cannot escape the way things are mechanistically going to happen, or because grace is so compulsive that it sets aside human efforts and forces man to do the will of Providence. The claim is that the novel would be either a disunified novel because a free conversion is unprepared for earlier or a pessimistic deterministic novel because the novel shows compulsion towards conversion. The weakness in this charge of false determinism, however, is that Tarwater is not suddenly changed to become the opposite type of character because of some irresistible force. That the change is not sudden, that the force pressuring Tarwater towards prophetism is resistible can be proved if the reader examines the symbolic texture of the story as that texture emerges from Flannery O'Connor's patterns in the choice of words and from her selectivity in including incidents and details unexplainable by the promoters of the deterministic theory.

First of all, the reader must understand that even if the book is deterministic, it is not pessimistic. Flannery O'Connor noted in a letter how readers, "even Catholic readers who should have known better, identified with Rayber, the materialist rather than the fanatic, Old Tarwater." Her own preference was not in

4The previous chapter revealed this verbal texture - along with sensitivity to symbolic patterns, mentioned in the latter part of this sentence - as primary to Flannery O'Connor's judgement-frame.

"Old Tarwater is the hero of 'The Violent Bear It Away,' and I'm right behind him one hundred per cent ... He lacks the visible Church, but Christ is the center of his life."6

"I wanted to get across the fact that the great Uncle [Old Tarwater] is the Christian - a sort of crypto-Catholic and that the school teacher [Rayber] is the typical modern man. The boy [young Tarwater] has to choose which one, which way he wants to follow. It's a matter of vocation."7 Those who find the book pessimistic identify with Rayber and find it sad that Tarwater cannot resist his desires to follow the way of the apparent-humanist Rayber. Flannery O'Connor's explicit statements outside the novel, however, indicate that it is good for Tarwater to follow the way of Old Tarwater. Like Hazel Motes, Tarwater reaches integrity in his not being able to "get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind" - Christ.8 Tarwater wins and does not pessimistically get crushed. Critics can claim that the book is still pessimistic. They can claim that although Tarwater is not condemned to evil, he is determined by grace and thus presents a gloomy view of human ability. Flannery O'Connor's explicit statements, however, explain that Tarwater's baptizing Bishop is only apparently dictated by Providence and that his return to the city is only apparently determined by supernatural forces.

Miss O'Connor's explicit statements deny that Tarwater is determined in either direction, towards good or evil. She rejects determinism on the grounds of theology, literature, and experience:

My view of free will follows the traditional Catholic teaching. I don't think any genuine novelist is interested in writing about a world of people who are strictly determined. Even if he writes about characters who are mostly unfree, it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of illuminating the picture and giving it light. So that while predictable predetermined actions have a comic interest for me it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have on my eye as the thing which will make a story work.

Tarwater is certainly free and meant to be; if he appears to have a compulsion to be a prophet, I can only insist that in this compulsion there is a mystery of God's will for him and that is not a compulsion in the clinical sense.

Miss O'Connor sees that it is a false definition of freedom and an unreal view of man's condition to think that man makes choices in a vacuum. Man's free will is "a mystery." It "cannot be conceived simply." Tarwater had free will because throughout the novel he had many wills conflicting within him: "free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man."

Tarwater is not irrevocably slanted towards Kayber or towards Old Tarwater; he battled within himself choosing between them. The fact that one of these wills wins in the end does not mean that...

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Tarwater is determined; it means simply that he has finally made his free choice among the conflicting wills within himself. Flannery O'Connor endorsed Sr. Gable's response to those who, like Ferris, claim that it "is with the passion of fanatism and despair, not of religion, that hell fire behind him and darkness before him, he begins to walk back to the city," that Tarwater has capitulated to circumstances. Sr. Gable responds that Tarwater must follow the laws of nature and "fulfill God's will" as must all creatures; but she indicated that the important issue is to see whether or not Tarwater is accepting "God's ways."¹¹ God's will shall emerge victorious; the observer must see whether that will is to be fulfilled via God's own ways. Since even the harshest critics do not deny that Tarwater struggles against these ways of God, Flannery O'Connor's point is proved. Tarwater is free, if freedom is defined not unrealistically as absence of pressures or as the absence of any or all internal or external inducements, but as the ability to come down for one or the other of the warring internal tendencies. Flannery O'Connor points to this internal war as evidence that Tarwater is free. She does not intend that Tarwater's actions are to be viewed as determined or as pessimistic.

The heart of the problem for critics who view The Violent Bear It Away as containing deterministic pessimism because of its sudden ending, however, is not so much that they misunderstand free will or misinterpret the hero of the story but that they mis-

¹¹Gable, "The Ecumenic Core" 136.
read the climax. Certainly the scene where Tarwater unclenches his fist for the final visions is the point at which he is irrevocably set on the way of the prophet. But the turning point for Tarwater's choice between Old Tarwater and Rayber comes earlier. It is not the sudden forced conclusion determinists see, but an organic gradual shaping of determination - of deliberate choice - growing out of the full story. Flannery O'Connor has made explicit statements about this turning point also. Flannery O'Connor's usual critical and philosophic theory would call for a turning point to come at the time when the force of evil, the devil, crests to an "intensity of ... evil," pierces pretentions and "teaches most of the lessons that lead to self-knowledge." 12 Sr. Gable "has it on Flannery O'Connor's word that the devil" made concrete in the pervert of The Violent Bear It Away" overreaches himself and does God's word despite his evil intent" when he outrages Tarwater so that Tarwater is speeded and directed towards becoming a prophet. 13 Flannery O'Connor herself quite clearly indicates that both the scene with the devil-pervert and the scene of final vision are to be taken as a building climax when she says that "Tarwater's final vision could not have been brought off if he hadn't met the man in the lavender and cream-colored car. This is another mystery" - presumably the mystery of how good emerges from evil in Flannery

O'Connor's thinking and stories. Finally, Miss O'Connor approved explicitly of McCown's interpretation that Tarwater continues fighting the faith after the drowning of the Bishop, rationalizing that he did not really utter the words of baptism, and admiring the materialism of Rayber's can-opener. In the pervert scene, however, "by the permissive will of Providence the devil overplays his hand" so that Tarwater, who had never been so corrupt that he could allow sins of the flesh, takes to fire which purifies and enlightens, as a "symbol of his first step toward repentence." Back at Powderhead, Tarwater has his moments of grace in the visions which fuse all the book's meaning, so that the young prophet is formed and sets off readily on his mission. The climax of The Violent Bear It Away, therefore, is seen by Flannery O'Connor as a summit that gradually approaches and builds in intensity throughout "Part Three" of the novel and not just a sudden compulsion forced on Tarwater in the final two pages. The last of these explicit statements about what has happened in The Violent Bear It Away raises the question of how so many critics can have made mistakes in interpreting the book. The psychological reason for the mistakes has already been examined in the theory section of the present study: Flannery O'Connor would feel that such misinterpretations are typical of the blinded modern who accepts distortions as normal. As has

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15 McCown, "The Education of a Prophet; A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," 77.
already been shown, Miss O'Connor feels that her "characters are described as despairing," as pessimistically determined, "only by superficial critics. Very few of my characters despair and those who do, don't reflect my views. You have to get the writer's view by looking at the novel as a whole. These explicit statements from Flannery O'Connor about what she was trying to do in The Violent Bear It Away have only minor biographical values, however, unless they can be supported by a study of the book and unless Miss O'Connor can show the determinists to be really "superficial critics" who have not looked "at the novel as a whole." By Miss O'Connor's own claim and by aesthetic demand, this climax is something that should be seen emerging from the total texture of the book.

A study of the texture of symbol patterns in The Violent Bear It Away, therefore, will serve as an illustration of Miss O'Connor's theory that fiction must be "sacramental"; it also should show that, as Miss O'Connor together with McCowan has claimed, the controversial ending of the book fuses all the book's symbols and allows the careful reader to discover Miss O'Connor's Christian judgements emerging from the book as a whole. The present chapter will concentrate on the texture (symbols, verbal pattern, shifting view-point, etc.) of the climax, while the next chapter will pursue texture throughout the novel.

A close study of the wording of that final vision scene wherein Tarwater's fists indicate a final determination of his life's goals and conflict provide the best place to begin studying the symbol pattern in *The Violent Bear It Away* not only because, as Miss O'Connor has indicated through McCowan's remarks, it fuses all the symbols of the book but also because one can then see better how this climax is an outgrowth of the whole story rather than a sudden excrescence dictated by the desire to preach.\(^{17}\)

This final scene has five main parts, as Tarwater has several visions here and makes several actions.

First, Tarwater finally moves his eyes to look directly at Old Tarwater's grave:

*His gaze rested finally on the ground where the wood entered the grave.*

*Nothing seemed alive about the boy except his eyes and they stared downward at the cross as if they followed below the surface of the earth to where its roots encircled all the dead.*

The Negro sat watching his strange face, and grew uneasy. The skin across it tightened as he watched and the eyes, lifted beyond the grave, appeared to see something in the distance. Buford turned his head. The darkening field behind him stretched downward towards the woods. When he looked again, the boy's vision seem to pierce the very air. The Negro trembled and felt suddenly a pressure on him too great to bear. He sensed it as burning in the atmosphere. His nostrils twitched. He muttered something and turned the mule around and moved across the back field and down to the woods.\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\)As a result, however, the interpretations in this chapter may seem somewhat forced - until the next chapter shows how the patterns flow through the entire novel.

\(^{18}\) O'Connor, *The Violent*, 446.
The elements whereby this passage connects organically with the whole book are the following: (1) the notion of vision as the sight of what is "in the distance" foreign to the local environment - and that therefore a vision goes "below the surface of the earth," can "pierce the air," and penetrates the density of matter; (2) the way wood triggers Tarwater's vision; (3) the sensation of weight when one is faced with such a vision (Buford feels" a pressure on him too great to bear"); (4) the intuition that such a vision is connected with fire; (5) the notion that vision will lead to a perception that all men are eventually "encircled."

Then as Tarwater remains in trance, "his still eyes reflecting the field the Negro had crossed", a second vision comes to him:

It seemed to him no longer empty but peopled with a multitude. Everywhere, he saw dim figures seated on the slope and as he gazed he saw a single basket from which the throng was being fed. His eyes searched the crowd for some time as if he could not find the one he was looking for. Then he saw him. The old man was lowering himself to the ground. When he was down and his bulk had settled, he leaned forward, his face turned toward the basket, impatiently following its progress towards him. The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him. His hunger was so great that he could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied.

He stood there, straining forward, but the scene faded in the gathering darkness. Night descended until there was nothing but a thin streak of red between it and the black line of
earth but still he stood there. This vision can be comprehended fully only if it is studied together with Tarwater's third religious experience which rose from the second vision:

He felt his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide. He felt it rising in himself through time and darkness, rising through the centuries, and he knew that it rose in a line of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it, who would wander in the world, strangers from that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth. He felt it: building from the blood of Abel to his own, rising and engulfing him. It seemed in one instant to lift and turn him. He whirled toward the treeline.

These scenes are an organic outgrowth of the whole book mainly because they show the motif of emptiness or absence contrasted with the notion of fullness. This motif takes the following several forms:

Obviously hunger and food is an important aspect of the motif. Tarwater is literally hungry, since he has not eaten well for several days and has vomited on the lake. His spiritual hunger he feels "as a tide... rising in himself... through the centuries," urging him to the prophetic career that the "blood of Abel" brings also to Daniel, Elijah and Moses. A similar spiritual hunger is seen in Old Tarwater and the multitude, who are envisioned as straining eagerly for the multiplied loaves and fishes. This type of hunger is important because Flannery O'Connor here uses it to connect and to climax several

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 446-7
21 Ibid., 447
symbolic strands which run through the book and which will be analyzed later in this discussion. She uses this hunger to connect the prophetic calling to Old Testament prophetism with the calling of the New Testament Christ. When Tarwater admits that his hunger is "the same as the old man's," a hunger "so great that he could have eaten all of the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied," the reader is to see this calling to be filled as the Christian's vocation to be filled with Christ (whatever that means to Flannery O'Connor) - a process the same as the calling to be filled with the spirit of prophecy which has been the most obvious calling haunting Tarwater throughout the book. Flannery O'Connor relates the Old Testament and New Testament motifs also by making it be Old Tarwater, embodiment of the Old Testament's spirit of prophecy, who is viewed as possessed by a longing for the miraculous banquet of the New Testament. Finally the two motifs are united by the fact that the loaves of bread and fishes are emphasized by the gospel story. The reader is reminded of the continued emphasis on Old Tarwater's eyes as "fish-colored" and reminded of Tarwater's frequent attempts to scorn the "bread of life." 22 Thus the reader can interpret passages relating to a struggle over prophetic vocation as equivalent symbolically to passages relating to the struggle of the Christian soul to reach its perfection - the struggle to accept faith in Christ, to accept the Christian methods and goals, and to

22 There will be a discussion below, pp. 236-9 and 244-7, and footnote 32, of these eyes and of this bread of life.
accept the implications of the Christian Eucharist. The hunger passage also suggests the presence or lack of water, as much as of solid food, since the prophetic charisma acts as a "tide" "rising and engulfing" Tarwater. The hunger passages here, therefore, indicate Tarwater's physical hunger as symbolic of his spiritual lack of fidelity to Tarwater, his lack of Old Testament-intense prophetism, his missing faith in Christ and in the Christian message or sacraments.

A prophetic charisma is signified by a second kind of fullness and emptiness which connects the first vision with the second. Prophets are seen as those who must "wander in the world" as strangers from the violent country" because they are filled with the emptiness of the tide of the spiritual hunger. In the first vision Tarwater is pictured as having a vision that penetrated to environs foreign to earth. The present intuition of vision presents that foreign country as opposed to the "world" in which the prophet roamed as a displaced person, a stranger. Thus, the silent, true country of the prophet is whatever is not present material world where fullness comes from having much matter; rather it is of the immaterial world which is best described as something lacking in food and human activities.

Besides hunger and food, there are other forms of fullness and emptiness as shown in this passage. Absence of movement is contrasted with vigorous steadfast focused movement and
with whirling confused movement. Tarwater stands still with "still eyes" staring. Emptiness of human movement results in the rising tides of the prophetic inspiration surging with focused vigor, "rising and engulfing" Tarwater. Old Tarwater, "leaned forward" eager to share the loaves, and Tarwater is "straining forward" to see and share in the vision more completely. It is interesting to note that just before the first vision at the grave, Tarwater's eyes had been restless and shifting; they "take the far circuit" even to the fig tree beyond it to the far tree line and back restlessly trying to avoid contact with such absolutes as the grave, conscience, and Old Tarwater. Tarwater noticed that this time "a deep-filled quiet pervading everything. The encroaching dusk seemed to come softly in deference to some mystery that resided there. He stood, leaning slightly forward." 23 The pattern that runs throughout the book is evident here. Shiftless, restless, undirected, circular, back-and-forward movement indicates a refusal - literally and figuratively - to face the absolute - death, the grave, the past, God. This restless, circular, back-and-forward movement is contrasted with the rock-like stillness of an approaching vision of the absolute. At other times when this pattern occurs in the book, Tarwater will fight against the approaching stillness that here he joins. The stillness of the place of vision becomes equivalent to Tarwater's own lack of movement. The reader is shown Tarwater as he ceases his own movement and joins stillness; the reader is

shown the absence of human power, the lack of human movement. But even this stillness is negative. It is a humble acknowledgement that the fullness of this world’s movements are useless, circular reaching of movement of this world; at least the stillness does not remove obstacles. It brings man still so that he can be focused in meaningful movement. Thus we have Tarwater and Old Tarwater leaning forward toward ultimate fulfillment; we have the surging pressure of the "tide" of prophetism filling Tarwater with purpose. Eventually even these purposeful, focused action boils to another swirl of circular confusion as it is seen "rising and engulfing" Tarwater, "in an instant" seeming "lift and turn him" as he seems "whirl... toward the tree line," where there is a "rising and spreading in the night."

This new swirling, however, is simply the preparation for an even greater force of direction to come in the next vision Tarwater has. Swirling, circular action, stillness, and aimed forceful pushing-forward are, therefore, a second example of the fullness-emptiness motif indicating the presence of some above-natural, super-natural force in the story.

Fullness and emptiness occur also with light and darkness. Most absences of light and sound, like absence of movement seem representative of how material ability is finite, representative of the need for the supranatural. The miraculous multitude is "dim" figures that fade in the "gathering darkness," which is

24 Ibid., 447.
separated by the "black line of earth" from only a thin red streak of sunset. A prophetic inspiration rises not only in a tide of hunger and an absence of food but also in an absence of light "rising in" Tarwater, "through time and darkness." Likewise the foreign country to which the prophet belongs is a country without sound, "where the silence is never broken." As with the lack of action, however, lack of sound is not an ultimate goal; it is an absence of this insufficient material world. A foreign country of the prophet can have its silence "broken to shout the truth." If the sound is very vigorous, direct, focused, etc., it is present in the prophet's country just as focused "leaning forward" is an action present in the prophet's country. The next vision shows, moreover, that mere absence of light is not the best good, any more than mere absence of sound or actions; after the growing darkness of Tarwater's lesser vision there is "rising and spreading in the night, a red-gold tree of fire. . . . as if it would consume the darkness in one tremendous burst of flame."25 The third vision shows that focused, bursting, energetic, purposeful life is better than darkness - should "consume the darkness" - just as directed, "violent," sound and action consume silence and stillness. Such emptiness, it is true, is better than fullness with the things of this world - just as also, violent, focused

25 Ibid.
eating that can "have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied" is better than the ravaging hunger that Tarwater had been feeling. The emptiness of Tarwater's hunger is, however, better than merely being satisfied with the fullness of this world. Tarwater's second vision and its subsequent intuition, therefore, develop the motif of fullness and emptiness; they also further define and expand on the notion of the foreign country. In this second and third climactic experience, Flannery O'Connor's philosophic notion of the insufficiency of this world and her notion of the presence of a deeper reality of the things of this world is seen emerging in symbols concerned with hunger (including bread and fishes), water, light, sound, violent action, and the foreign country.

The fourth experience Tarwater has at the end of The Violent Bear It Away - the third vision - follows so closely on the previous experiences that some of the important aspects of it have already been mentioned. Tarwater had just felt the prophetic tide of hunger whirl him towards the tree line.

There, rising and spreading in the night, a red-gold tree of fire ascended as if it would consume the darkness in one tremendous burst of flame. The boy's breath went out to meet it. He knew that this was the fire than encircled Daniel, that had raised Elijah, from the earth, that had spoken to Moses and would in the instant speak to him. He threw himself to the ground and with his face against the dirt of the grave, he heard to command. Go Warn the Children of God of the Terrible Speed of Mercy. The words were as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood. When finally he raised himself the burning
bush had disappeared. 26

Already noted is the way circular, whirling action – compared to the circle of fire preceding Daniel's prophetic experience – and here further "rising and spreading" after having engulfed and whirled Tarwater – precedes this vision and leads once again to vigorous, direct, focused action in "one tremendous burst" and in Tarwater's throwing himself to the ground. Also noted already is the way dark emptiness must precede violent light. Here again is silence, but a silence that is not absolute. As with other emptinesses, it is an absence of the sounds of earth, a silence broken by words of the same supra-natural voice that had given the focused directions of command to Moses. The legend of the great Old Testament prophet is an example of how Flannery O'Connor uses Biblical "mythology" to shape her meanings; the reader is forced to recognize how the focused fullness which replaces the emptiness that overcomes material fullness is the same force that inspires prophetism to reject the way of this world and to be "raised... from the earth." Finally, vision comes to Tarwater through a "tree" as he faces the "tree line," just as it had come through the wood of the cross on Old Tarwater's grave in the first vision.

The main new element in this vision is the symbol of fire. The words come to Tarwater from a "tree of fire" from a "burst of flame," from the "fire" encircling Daniel, raising Elijah, and

26 Ibid., Apparently the text contains a misprint of "to" for "the."
speaking to Moses. The flame and its voice are, in fact, the same as what Moses experienced in the "burning bush." It was the burning in the atmosphere which had caused Buford's nostrils to twitch and which Buford had felt as a great pressure during Tarwater's first vision. Flannery O'Connor is using fire, as she had used hunger, on the basic plot level. Just as one explanation of Tarwater's hunger is his trouble with food during the last few days, so his experience with fire is partly, on the level of plot, the result of the two series of fires he had started - after awakening from his bout with the homosexual and after having another bout with the devil-stranger who had been speaking to Tarwater since Old Tarwater had died. But Flannery O'Connor's context places secondary, symbolic meanings on the fire. Associating fire, in the first vision, with the sight that sees through and beyond the material world, Miss O'Connor equates it with the same supra-natural force as is operative in the sequence on fullness and emptiness. By associating fire with the weight-imagery of the first vision, Flannery O'Connor reminds the reader to equate the weight symbolism of the novel with the same prophetic force that fire and emptiness—with-focused (as opposed to whirling) fullness to suggest. More importantly, however, by associating fire with experience of the prophets and especially (explicitly) with Moses' burning bush, Flannery O'Connor assures that the reader will associate all these related symbolic motifs with the prophetic experience, with religion, and especially (because of the bush)
with the hearing and experiencing of God himself. The abundant fire imagery of The Violent Bear It Away becomes clear with such a meaningful climax.

Of lesser interest but still important for the organic texture of the book are a few other items in this vision passage. The words of God are described as "seeds," and they so deeply affect Tarwater that they are something "opening out" and meshing into the blood that negotiates Tarwater's entire body. Also, Flannery O'Connor's notion that good must grow from evil and supreme fullness of being from limited being is reflected in the notion that from on high, where a tree of fire had "ascended," Tarwater receives his message by getting himself down as low as possible with "face against the dirt," that contact with God's full-being (perhaps with the Christ-tree "ascended on high") comes out of a death, through closeness to a grave, a tree, a cross. The fact that the fire is "red-gold" seems not too important because such would be a likely color for a fire. But redness is heavily stressed in the final section of the book. Flannery O'Connor is one to weigh the use of every detail. Red is what separates the darkness of vision and the darkness of birth in the second vision - "a thin streak of red between" the light into which the vision faded and "the black line of earth." The fire from which Tarwater's vision speaks passes eventually to a "dull red cloud of smoke." Indeed redness along with pink and purple is a characteristic frequently stressed throughout the
book. It would seem that red - because of its brightness in contrast to pink and purple and because of its association with fire - is a color of intenseness and violence; purple and pink are emptier colors and thus can eventually be associated with evil. 27 The phrase "children of God," used both by the inspirational voice and by Tarwater's mind in the last sentence of the book carries overtones of the same united brotherhood of man as occurs also in the first vision where the roots of Old Tarwater's cross are seen to "encircle all the dead," in a foreign land away from this earth. This notion of the brotherhood of man occurs also in the second vision where the Christian eschatological banquet is emphasized as being served "from a single basket." The brotherhood notion is reinforced by another recollection: because earlier references indicate that hunger can be satisfied not only by the heavenly banquet but also by "the bread of life," this heavenly banquet also suggests Christ's food of the Eucharist, sacrament of unity and love. 28

27 See below, pp.239-244, where fire is shown to be a purifying force of intensity and purple is shown to be associated with the devil-pervert. Also, the fact that redness grows from a thin line to a wide glow by the end of the book signifies the way violence eventually carries Tarwater away.

28 Thus too the earlier comment that the emptiness was filled with the fullness of Christ was justified when one notes that the miraculous bread and fishes are also the Eucharistic banquet. They can be equated with the Eucharistic banquet because of the traditional interpretation of this passage of the Bible, and also because of the way Flannery O'Connor's frequent references to "bread of life" focus into this final passage where hunger is fully satisfied with Christ's bread.
This passage has the inspired voice commanding Tarwater to help others; he is to "warn" those who are not fully capable of helping themselves because they are God's "children." The man who is a sharer in Old Testament prophetism and New Testament grace must display that unity of men in the action of brotherly love and assistance. Moreover, the wording of the command as a whole is significant. Charges that Flannery O'Connor is pessimistic and shows no hope of salvation must dissipate under such a direct passage. Tarwater is to help others to whom he is unified in brotherly love; his help consists in the message of God's mercy. Both factors encourage one to interpret this passage as indicative that Miss O'Connor's view of life is affirmative and not simply negative, realistic and/or optimistic and not just pessimistic. Man can do things for his ultimate good - or Miss O'Connor would not show him as being able to use a warning. Man can do things to help others. And their goal is a God of mercy.

A reader could complain that Miss O'Connor may have a strange sort of mercy in mind. Mercy is mentioned only two other times in the story. First Old Tarwater insists that "even the mercy of the Lord burns." Tarwater is to aid men in view of the terribleness approaching them. The fact that mercy burns and the fact that its speed is terrible may make this vision's command seem gloomy. For Flannery O'Connor it is not gloomy. Neither is it sentimentally optimistic. Flannery O'Connor's philosophic theory rejects

29 O'Connor, The Violent, 314.
sentimentalism, rejects a salvation that tries "skipping the process" of "our slow participation" in the struggle to redress loss of innocence, that forgets "what man has done to the things of God." While Flannery O'Connor's basic message is that moderns have forgotten the "price of restoration" and expect "mock innocence," Miss O'Connor insists that man's salvation, philosophic as well as theological, must come from struggle, that real (as opposed to mock) mercy will burn with terror, that mercy and salvation, defined as humans helping humans to a better goal—that is a part of life. The optimism, or rather realism, and affirmativeness of The Violent Bear It Away is signaled by the wording of this command Tarwater receives.

Again, the fact that mercy burns causes the reader to perceive one more aspect of the texture by which Flannery O'Connor holds the novel together organically. It is appropriate that Tarwater hear the prophetic voice using fire to speak words of mercy because mercy itself is a fire. Mercy is thus equated with fullness and light and focused action, with prophetism and the Eucharistic brotherhood of love, for it is equal with the fire.

30 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 734. One should note that this paper is not attempting to prove by mere reference to Flannery O'Connor's expository writing that O'Connor rejected sentimentalism and is not gloomy. These references to Flannery O'Connor's expository writing are intended to set forth her thinking about the "price of restoration." The quotations from the novel and interpretation of the significant passages should prove to confirm and illustrate the thinking of Flannery O'Connor displayed in her expository writing. Her attitudes on these matters have already been analyzed—see above pp. 85-88.

that has been equated symbolically with such items. Moreover, this is not a pessimistic mercy because *The Violent Bear It Away* insists on many occasions that the "evils that befall prophets" are of two kinds: those "that come from the world, which are trifling, and those that come from the Lord and burn the prophet clean; for he himself [Old Tarwater] had been burned clean and burned clean again. He had learned by fire." Such a passage confirms the preceding view and reinforces the earlier argument that when Miss O'Connor equates fire with mercy she is not being pessimistic but realistic; one of the main attributes of fire is to "burn your eyes clean."³²

After Tarwater has been violated by the pervert, he had felt that the spot in which he awoke was unclean also. In fact one main reason why Flannery O'Connor has Tarwater shout an "obscenity" to the lady who sells pop was that she can show how he reacts to such ill abuse. Even his vulgar language "echoed sullenly in his head. The boy's mind was too fierce to brook impurities of such a nature. He was intolerant of unspiritual evils and with those of the flesh he had never troubled. He felt his victory sullied by the remark that had come from his mouth." It is of little wonder then that Tarwater should feel even more "sullied" when he realizes that the pervert has done more than

³²O'Connor, *The Violent*, 306, 348, 323, 384-5, and 392. Note how it is the "eyes" - symbol of the merely human ability of reason perhaps, reason unwilling (because of a divorce from honest emotion as it sees the pain of fire to be "burned clean" - it is the eyes that are the object of fire.
utter mere words of sexual abuse. As soon as Tarwater awakes after the pervert had left, therefore, he hastens to put on his clothes, stares at the ground he considers sullied and evil because of the perverted abuse that had occurred on it, and moves to purify the spot by fire: "he kicked the leaves together and set them on fire. Then he tore off a pine branch and set it on fire and began to fire all the bushes around the spot until the fire was eating greedily on the evil ground, burning every spot the stranger could have touched." As with the purifying fire of mercy burning eyes clean, so with the fire in the woods; evil impurities must be removed by suffering. Flannery O'Connor reinforces the fact and reminds the reader of the passages showing fire's function of purifying the "eyes" when she pictures Tarwater after he set fire to the perverted woods; "his scorched eyes no longer looked hollow or as if they were meant to only guide him forward. They looked as if, touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again." Again the Biblical "myth" of the lips purified by coal convinces the reader that fire is, as in the scene of the final vision, a force directly symbolizing not only the spirit of prophecy but also the agent that purifies for a good life, for which prophecy itself is a symbol and a causing force.

33 Ibid., 483.
34 That prophecy is a symbol of good life was proved earlier in the second vision when the fullness with the Eucharistic miraculous food heavenly reward is equated with the prophetic "tide."
The reader should also note at this time the significance of the second fire Tarwater sets at Powderhead. This significance is appreciated only if one realizes how cleverly Flannery O'Connor has used carefully patterned connotative phrasing to evoke devil symbolism from the descriptions of the pervert and of Tarwater's stranger-friend (inner voice). Miss O'Connor shows that the reader should treat the stranger-friend-pervert-devil as symbolically one because of her meshing connotations and because of the way the book treats these "characters" in random order, gradually causing the "characters" to lose their distinctness. Eventually fire offers Miss O'Connor's authorial judgement on these characters and on their side of the real and symbolic conflict.

When Tarwater is tempted by his constant companion the stranger-friend-devil who wants Tarwater to abandon prophecy and abandon others in living for himself alone, he does not continue to accept this advice as he has done so often throughout the novel. He "shook himself free fiercely" from the urging of that voice, setting the fire all around again, and was not satisfied so that "his spirits rose again" until he felt that his evil "adversary would soon be consumed in a roaring blaze." Again, apparently Tarwater uses the fire as a good, to purify himself from the devil. This stranger-friend from whom Tarwater is

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35 Accordingly this discussion of the "characters" must move back and forth from one to the other, associating and equating them, and evolving their total significance as gradually and evocatively as does Miss O'Connor.
trying to free himself is certainly the devil because he is finally identified symbolically with the pervert. Even the liquor which Tarwater had swallowed after Old Tarwater died seemed to be a "burning arm" that "slid down Tarwater's throat as if the devil were already reaching inside him to finger his soul." The pervert offers Tarwater this liquor which is the arm of the devil. Moreover, the metaphors describing the devil-liquor as something that tries to get inside a human "to finger his soul" suggests sexual abuse similar to what the pervert finally worked on Tarwater. The pervert can be equated with the devil, therefore, not only because of the evil he works, but because of the way he is, through liquor and the suggestion of sexual abuse, carrying on actions which the book indicates are characteristic of the devil. There is even a clearer passage linking the pervert with the devil. Old Tarwater warns Tarwater: "You are the kind of boy . . . that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke, or a drink or a ride, and to ask you your bidnis. You had better mind how you take up with strangers. And keep your bidnis to yourself! It was to foil the devil's plans for him that the Lord had seen to his upbringing." The pervert is further identified with the devil because he is called the "stranger," he gives Tarwater a ride and a smoke, and he violates Tarwater's physical integrity which is even more private than his "bidnis." The stranger-friend whose voice has been with Tarwater

throughout the book is connected with this devil-pervert because both are called the "stranger,"37 because both urge Tarwater to the same abandonment of prophecy in favor of a life of physical ease and pleasure apart from duty, and especially because both have the same symbolic scent and color. The pervert has a sweet, stale odor that pervades the whole car and allows no room for fresh air. But at Powderhead the stranger-friend has the same "warm sweet" pervasive . . . odor." Just as the pervert's car, shirt, eyes and handkerchief are lavender, so too is the scene when the stranger-friend tempts Tarwater. When Tarwater has succumbed to the temptations to drink instead of burying Old Tarwater, he must break through the "sweet familiar odor" a purple honeysuckle. When Tarwater vomits rejecting the evil food of this world, the vomit is purple. When Tarwater hears the stranger-friend's suggestion to drown Bishop, the sky is "intense purple." When Tarwater is open to the last temptations from the friend-stranger, he perceives the "honeysuckle odor" instead of Powderhead's "sharper scent of pine." When Tarwater finally decides that this stranger's voice is not that of the "friend but of an enemy, the friend-stranger is called not an opponent or an enemy - but an "adversary" with a grinning presence to "match the leer" of the pervert.38 "Adversary" carries connotations for be-

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For example, when Tarwater first hears the voice, p. 309-10 etc; Tarwater starts calling the stranger his friend later, The Violent, p. 330.

ing the Biblical word for describing man's chief enemy, the devil. Earlier discussions of the meaning of weight make the present reference to the weight of the "warm sweet" scent interesting as further evidence for evil, rejection of the other-worldly.

Thus, when Tarwater burns the wood after the pervert leaves and when he burns the woods on hearing the voice of the friend-stranger, the symbolism is of fire that purifies, that removes the evils of the symbolically equated stranger-friend-pervert-devil and all the evils symbolically associated with their aspect of the novel's conflict. When these burnings are so understood in climax in the closing scene, critics who feel that Tarwater's conversion is sudden and unprepared for are ignoring the fact that this conversation has been prepared for by Tarwater's very first rejection of these evil-devils even through positive fullness of new vision has not yet come across to him. In any event, fire in The Violent Bear It Away has as its attributes the ability to "burn your eyes clean," to help establish man's greater vision as man struggles for the clearer and truer vision of himself, to provide through an evil for man's removal of self-deception - a process which the earlier chapters' study of Flannery O'Connor's ethic found desirable in the life of good men.

Finally, evidence that this passage presents a truly affirmative and non-pessimistic picture of man's goal in life
comes from referring to the third and final time when mercy is mentioned in the book. In one of his "prophect" rages at powderhead, Old Tarwater had once sarcastically shouted that Rayber and his wife were leading an evil life because of the way they and their society had ignored and abused Old Tarwater. Old Tarwater quoted the maxims of such people: "Ignore the Lord Jesus as long as you can! Spit out the bread of life and sicken on honey. Whom work beckons, to work! Whom blood to blood! Whom lust to lust! Make haste, make haste. Fly faster and faster, spin yourselves in a fit of frenzy, the time is short!"\(^{39}\) Even this message introducing Old Tarwater's "prophecy" is significant because it features many of the same symbolic items present in the final prophetic visions of Tarwater. Tarwater also began his final visions by trying to ignore what he should face; he had kept his eye roving and his thoughts occupied so that he would not have to look at Old Tarwater's grave or at Buford's accusing gaze. Eventually, however, Tarwater came to look on the multitude receiving miraculous loaves, which are equated with this "bread of life" that the moderns ignore and reject. Becoming sick on honey refers to the way apparent goods of this world lead to evil, and perhaps refers to the way the pervert is described as smelling of a sweet perfume—evils that seem alluring like honey but should really sicken the worthy man and lead him to a hunger for what is better than this world. The slogans "Make

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 339.
haste, make haste. Fly faster and faster. Spin yourselves into a frenzy" - confirm earlier conclusions that circular, unfocused multiplying of human actions and physical movements are evils of this limited world and must be replaced by an emptiness and stillness that repudiates limited good, and eventually by focused forceful action.

Just as Flannery O'Connor's book does not finish with mere admonitions on what to avoid, so Old Tarwater's prophecy is not finished at this point. He goes on to say:

The Lord is preparing a prophet. The Lord is preparing a prophet with fire in his hand and eye and the Lord is moving toward the city with his warning. The prophet is coming with the Lord's message. "Go warn the children of God" saith the Lord, "of the terrible speed of justice." Who will be left? Who will be left when the Lord's mercy strikes?  

Whether Old Tarwater or Tarwater or neither is to be this prophet is unimportant; the prophet, as has been said, is the good man who counteracts this world's evils. He comes in the same cleansing, focused fire that accompanies the divine message in Tarwater's vision. The divine message is very similar too. But there is a difference between Old Tarwater's and Tarwater's view of the divine message. Old Tarwater acknowledges that the divine message urges human efforts of heeding and warning; he acknowledges that mercy is what is coming. He holds to mercy

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40 Ibid.

41 The prophet is focused because he is controlled in hand and eye. Having control and focus in the eye especially reminds the reader of the fact that this is a good fire, because the reader cannot help remembering the passages where the fire is to
less strongly and directly than does Tarwater, however. For Old Tarwater it is the Lord's justice that is coming to the world of man with terribleness. For Tarwater it is the Lord's mercy. Indirectly, in his next sentence, Old Tarwater indicates that mercy and justice are equated, that the earlier discussion was correct in concluding that Flannery O'Connor is trying to distinguish between the sentimental mercy of an unstruggling leap to mock innocence and the mercy that demands struggle, burning, and justice. Old Tarwater's views of the same words as Tarwater's final vision offers the reader one more piece of evidence that Flannery O'Connor has real mercy in mind - not a strange mercy of pessimism, but the true mercy of struggle and justice. Old Tarwater's use of these same words gives evidence that Flannery O'Connor has carefully woven the pattern and texture of this novel. Old Tarwater's use of these words give a good contrast between his Old Testament orientation as opposed to Tarwater's. At the end of the book Tarwater's evolved outlook on life is not quite the same as was Old Tarwater's. While Old Tarwater believed in mercy, he conceived of it in terms of stern justice. While Tarwater sees at the end that mercy is still terrible, his view that compassion is a direct end apart from but including justice allows Miss O'Connor to show by one more means that there is an affirmative, saving force at work in her novel even though it may

"burn your eyes."
not be as sentimental a compassion as some of her critics may desire.

In concluding the comparison between Old Tarwater's and Tarwater's vision, one should note Tarwater's interesting reaction to Old Tarwater's prophecy. While Old Tarwater is in his frenzy, the boy would take up the shot gun and hold it to his eye and sight along the barrel, but sometimes as his uncle grew more and more wild he would lift his face from the gun for a moment and a look of uneasy alertness, as if while he had been unattentive, the old man's words had been dropping one by one into him and now, silent, hidden in his blood stream, were moving secretly towards some goal of their own.  

Flannery O'Connor emphasizes the importance of the prophecy by repeating it, the second time at the climax of the book. Her repetition of Tarwater's reaction to the prophecy whenever it is uttered gives strengthened value to the earlier attention drawn to how Tarwater feels the words of his own vision to be "as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood," and underlines the parallels which Flannery O'Connor wishes the reader to draw between these two visions.

The fifth and last part of the final scene of The Violent Bear It Away is not concerned with Tarwater's further enlightenment in prophetic visions or intuitions. It shows instead the ultimate disposition of Tarwater after he has been affected by his visions and total experience.

42 O'Connor, The Violent, 339.
43 Ibid., 447.
The boy stopped and picked up a bunch of dirt off his great-uncle's grave and smeared it on his forehead. Then after a moment, he moved across the far field and off the way Buford had gone.

By midnight he had left the road and the burning woods behind him and had come out on the highway once more. The moon, riding low above the field beside him, appeared and disappeared, diamond-bright between patches of darkness. Intermittently the boy's jagged shadows slanted across the road ahead of him as if it cleared a rough path toward his goal. His singed eyes, black in their deep sockets, seemed already to envision the fate that awaited him, but he moved steadily on, his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping.44

Significant elements include continued fires fading into the darkness as Tarwater leaves Powderhead with its other-worldly atmosphere. Another significant element is the passages's indication that the children of God who lay sleeping are in need of a prophet. Tarwater's eyes have been "singed" by the fire, and presumably the fire has burned them as clean as had been predicted in the earlier symbolism of the novel. The reader is reminded of how Tarwater's eyes were said to have been "scorched" like the prophet's coal-purified lips after he had used fire to purify the place of perversion. Such eyes can "never be used for ordinary sight again"; they are the eyes of the prophet that look past and through the material sights to the realm of the foreign country of Heaven. The references to how Tarwater smeared the dirt of the grave on his forehead can be explained by noting the significance of "head" throughout the book. For example, of the eight

44Ibid.
rather lengthy paragraphs following Tarwater's unclenching of fists to signify his new life and to trigger his final visions, only four short paragraphs have not been quoted. As soon as Tarwater, unclenching his fists, begins his first vision and begins staring at Old Tarwater's grave, Buford remarks: "It's owing to me he's resting there. I buried him while you were laid out drunk. It's owing to me his corn has been plowed, it's owing to me the sign of his Savior is over his head."45 By itself this remark about how Old Tarwater has the sign of his Savior over his head may not seem of great significance, but in the light of Flannery O'Connor's unusual emphasis on "head" in this novel, the statement can be translated as an indication that ascendency over the "head" is Christianity's task. The head is a symbol of death and therefore a limitation of both the physical and (since it is Christ who had to die for men) the moral - a symbol of how the Christian ethic, the cross, must be "over" the head or self-sufficient reasonings of man. Instead of the independent head of the rationlist like Rayber who thinks he can solve the significance of life with his own thoughts alone - without feeling, prophecy, spirit, grace, love, etc. - Tarwater now displays reason submitting to the mysteries of man's limitedness. Faced with the primary limitation of death, the dirt of the grave, Tarwater has been led to envision man's general limitations or emptiness; he is accepting the greater power which the visions

45 Ibid., 442, 446.
have shown and which the consideration of death most forcefully brings home. Dirt on the forehead shows how man's head (reasonings) are superseded by the emptiness of the death-dirt-grave-emptiness, how man's head-reasonings are no more than dust.46

Also repeated from earlier sections of the final scene is the contrast between light and dark. Now that the moment of vision has passed, sheer radiations of brilliance are no longer described. It is midnight. The city is dark. There are patches of darkness, the shadows, and the black eyes. The imagery of emptiness is strongly present. This emptiness suggests creatures emptied of illusion about human abilities to display perfection of being. Tarwater is not now caught in the ordinary light of the everyday world; nor is he even completely in the darkness which is better than ordinary light. The sheer brilliance of the light of vision is gone but what remains is not dark emptiness or worse. What remains is a hard steady focused light "diamond-bright." Earlier judgement about fullness and emptiness suggests that a condition such as this indicates that Tarwater has been definitely removed from the materialistic self-sufficiency of the ordinary world and that he has advanced beyond the negative good of lacking the illusion of such self-sufficiency. Vision is not a condition that can remain constant while a man still lives and works in this world, but because of accepting his visions and missions Tarwater no longer falls back to darkness or worse. He

46 See references to the symbolic meaning of dust, pp. 337-338
retains light and an "unbreakably focused "diamond" light. His resolve is now set towards fulfilling his prophetic destiny. He lives fully. The same conclusion is reached when one examines the other prominent set of images in this closing paragraph. The emptiness-fullness pattern is present not only in the light imagery but also in the action imagery. Again the whirling, confused, circular motion is present. The moon "appeared and disappeared" bright and shadow exchanged places with each other "intermittently" as light mingles with patches of darkness. But the circular motions of the world, closed in on its impossible self-sufficiency and not breaking out through the greater force of spirit which supplies being to the world's limitations, is now not part of Tarwater's consciousness. Previously he too would have partaken of this circle of illusion. Now Tarwater is counteracting the force of this world. Now Tarwater is consistently and very frequently pictured as illustrating focused, forceful action. He rises from his vision and heads away from the grave "without looking back." His shadow is jagged, with sharp outlines that indicate a set fixation of body intent on its position, so that the light cuts sharply etched corners of shadow. Even the shadow seems to brook no obstacles, because it forges ahead of Tarwater and "cleared a rough path toward his goal." Tarwater is not tempted to join the circular swirl of this world's actions now; he has a goal towards which he moves with powerful directness, even the shadow clearing obstacles that
suggest the circular or wavering detours of alternate courses. Tarwater "moved steadily on, his face set." No longer does he display the erratic dashes of diffused energy splashing and jerking haphazardly, and ending by circling it on itself. Neither does he display the better quality of absence of movement. His moves now are "steady" as with disciplined directed vigor, he is "set" towards an undisputed goal.

A close study and interpretation of the final vision scene of The Violent Bear It Away, therefore, provides a good summary of Flannery O'Connor's thought in the novel and shows that her thinking in the book reflects the affirmative, realistic (as opposed to pessimistic deterministic) philosophy stated in her expository writings. Present are intimations of the notion of good through evil (as the fire purges and the devil-pervert's sexual abuse is a summit of evil leading Tarwater to good), the deficiency of mere reason or even humanism's merely human actions, the presence of a multiple-being in a detail of matter, brotherhood of love and men, and focused intensity of action. Many of Flannery O'Connor's stated techniques are present in this final scene also. Her use of many-level symbols is especially apparent in her use of the ambiguous fire and of the many kinds of fullness and emptiness, especially the multiple-leveled hunger and bread symbols which represent literal food, the Christian heaven, general fullness, the Eucharist and therefore
Christ himself and his love for others. The Biblical mythological framework is obvious. Irony is revealed especially in the contrast between the obvious literal "plot" meaning of the details and the way Flannery O'Connor's delicate nuances of wording shade these details into various levels of symbolic meaning - an especially organic irony for a novel one of whose main concerns is to contrast the materialistic man with the prophetic sacramental man who can view many things as having simultaneous being in sensed object or action. Irony and paradox shade such expressions as "silent word" and the unconsumable burning bush - and etch sharply the difference between earlier justice- prophecy in Old Tarwater and this later mercy- prophecy heard by Tarwater. This ending provides a good summary because here Flannery O'Connor fuses into a climax the various patterns of the novel. Especially significant are the motifs of emptiness, fullness (including hunger and food, light, sound, smell, water, three kinds of actions), fire, the displaced person in the foreign country - perceived in and through the physical objects which possess a deeper unity in their brotherly possession of the same spirit. In order to see Flannery O'Connor's verbal texture more extensively, to see that this texture throughout the book should have the same interpretation as it was here shown to have for the climax, and to see how this climactic fusion of symbols is an organic growth of the texture of the whole book, this study must turn itself to an examin-
ation of how these symbols that mesh at the climax of The Violent Bear It Away gather significance as the story unfolds. The next chapter will concern itself with this process.

47 That the ending is not, therefore, an artificial excrescence suddenly and artificially appearing in opposition to the main tendencies in the book is shown by such an organic outgrowth from the texture of the whole novel. In discussing how Tarwater rejects the evil-devil and seeks purification by fire, this study has already done some work in proving that the climax of the story comes not merely in the last two pages, but as Flannery O'Connor had suggested, in a mounting crescendo throughout part three of the novel and especially in chapters eleven and twelve. The remainder of this study will uncover these same patterns spread throughout the novel.
CHAPTER SIX

FURTHER EXPLICATION OF THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY!
An Examination of Unity Between the Climax and the Novel as a Whole

The imagery of light, sound, emptiness, the circle, and the three types of action is so frequent in The Violent Bear It Away that any thorough study of this imagery would necessitate a catalog of perhaps two hundred to three hundred items for each of these categories, merely in order to list all the times at which Flannery O'Connor weaves these details into the flow of the text. Since any such catalog and a fortiori any interpretation of such a catalog is beyond the purposes of the present work, this final chapter will attempt to examine three other important scenes in The Violent Bear It Away, in order to show how the gathering of symbols at the climax of the book is a result of symbolic patterns woven poetically from nuances of verbal density throughout the book.

The first of these three significant scenes is the time when Old Tarwater falls into a frenzy when he thinks of Rayber just after the truant officer leaves Powderhead (The truant officer is himself a Rayber-figure since his connection with the school allies him with the teacher-Rayber and with Rayber-rationalism). Since the passage uses the sense of smell in identifying good and evil, and puts great stress on the notion of hunger, it is useful for verifying the assertion made in the
previous chapter of this study — that these images flow from the whole book into a unified climax.

The young Tarwater is partly hostile to the vocation of being a prophet. Thus he is partly repelled when Old Tarwater pictures Jesus. Old Tarwater's use of the notion "stinking" shows that this notion has a connotation of evil in the large image patterns of the novel. Old Tarwater's stay in Rayber's house, for example, produces a "stench . . . \[that\] reached heaven"; it bore "stench and shame . . . dead words." Tarwater uses the same word when he pictures his vocation to follow Christ at the start of the book. Tarwater is repelled when Old Tarwater "spoke only of the sweat and stink of the cross of being born again to die, and of spending eternity eating the bread of life, and the boy would let his mind wander off to other subjects."

When Tarwater first presents himself at Rayber's house, the sight of Bishop calls up the following vision for Tarwater: "his black pupils, glassy and still, reflected depth on depth his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at least he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf." For the young Tarwater, Jesus is a bad smell which he must unhappily be forced to accept. Tarwater associates this bad smell with Jesus because early in the book he wants to reject his demanding vocation just as a person would instinctively reject a "stink." And the quotations indicate that Tarwater also rejects a heaven
featuring the bread of life each time the issue of the "stinking shadow of Jesus" arises. Flannery O'Connor shows Tarwater as rejecting Jesus' smell and Jesus' food. Opposed to this restricting "stinking shadow of Jesus" is Tarwater's notion that he could smell his freedom, pine-scented, coming out of the wood.¹

The pine-scent is a good smell. The enjoyment of the pine-scent wanes for Tarwater when Old Tarwater insists:

"You were born into bondage and baptized into the death of the Lord, into the death of the Lord Jesus Christ." Then the child would feel a sullenness creeping over him, a slow warm rising resentment that this freedom had to be connected with Jesus and that Jesus had to be the Lord.

The young Tarwater lives in a world of two smells - one that stinks and another piney smell that gives enjoyment and freedom. Again Flannery O'Connor does not present the issue of the good and evil smell apart from the motif of the "bread of life." While Tarwater is feeling the "warm rising resentment that this freedom had to be connected with Jesus and that Jesus had to be the Lord," Old Tarwater continues with the words:

"Jesus is the bread of life," the old man said. The boy, disconcerted, would look off into the distance over the dark blue tree line where the world stretched out, hidden and at its ease. In the darkness, most private part of his soul, hanging upsidedown like a sleeping bat, was the certain, undeniable knowledge that he has not hungry for the bread of life. Had the bush flamed for Moses, the sun stood still for Joshua, the lions turned aside for Daniel, only to prophesy the bread of life? Jesus? He felt a terrible disappointment in that conclusion, a dread that it was true. The old man said that as soon as he died, he would hasten to the banks of

the Lake of Galilee to eat the loaves and fishes that the Lord had multiplied.
"For ever?" the horrified boy asked.
"For ever," the old man said.
The boy sensed that this was the heart of his great-uncle's madness, this hunger, and what he was secretly afraid of was that it might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood and might strike some day in him and then he would be torn with a hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill it but the bread of life.2

Because of the wording of this passage, Tarwater's distaste for this bread of life seems applicable on several levels. On the surface, Tarwater is asserting his own personality and uniqueness; he is rejecting a life as a carbon copy of Old Tarwater. Tarwater rejects Jesus' miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes. He thereby rejects the need which the Jewish crowd recognized — the need to forsake personal physical delights in following Jesus. Tarwater is rejecting Flannery O'Connor's notion of Eucharistic possession of the divine being within the human — here as in the climax scene the phrasing "bread of life" suggests the Eucharist as it did in its original Biblical occurrence. Tarwater is rejecting the Eucharistic god-in-matter, and he is thereby also rejecting any union of the human with the divine; thus the material on the Old Testament prophets is woven in with Tarwater's rejection of the bread of life. Tarwater is rejecting the Divine Will manifested in the happenings of the material world (as that Will urges him to his vocation). He re-

2Ibid., 315
jects the divine nourishment of loaves and fishes. He rejects divine sense in the material words of Old Tarwater. He rejects the divine spirit in the bodies of the Old Testament prophets, and he rejects God in the matter of the Eucharist. More subtly than Rayber he rejects the limitations of matter—he rejects the notion that matter is pregnant with divine spirit. He rejects Flannery O'Connor's sacramental philosophy. So many levels of interpretation emerge from the texture of verbal nuance and allusion in this quotation, therefore, that even if the reader does not accept Flannery O'Connor's full theology of the Eucharist and sacramental nature of life in this world, he can still, via another layer of meaning, understand that Flannery O'Connor is concerned with the finiteness of man, with the notion that matter is limited and in a sense unlimited—because it is impregnated with divine being pulsing in it and transcending it. Early on his road to enlightenment, Tarwater tries to reject both the smell and the food of Jesus and thereby tries to reject his specific religious calling and his general calling to recognize God in matter.

Tarwater's interpretation of these symbolic smells changes during the book in a way that parallels the changes in Tarwater's character. Again at the climax Tarwater is confronted by these two smells. As he trudges back to Powderhead after having left the truck driver, Tarwater is still partly held by his earlier determination to reject the discipline of the cross, the
discipline that Flannery O'Connor's philosophy requires of the perfect man - a discipline that causes Tarwater, even this late in the book, to view his calling to follow Christ as a condition in which he would be following "the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, lost forever to his own inclinations." When Tarwater is confronted by the apex of evil, the devil (especially as personified in the pervert), he recognizes the two smells, "the odor of honeysuckle and the sharper scent of pine" - and he chooses the good pine. But now he does not view the following of Christ as a restriction on freedom and the spoiling of the beauty of the pine; as the previous chapter has shown, Tarwater recognizes that the devil-pervert is the one with the stink. Moreover, Tarwater no longer feels that Old Tarwater's hunger is a madness. That hunger has become very real, inescapable, and desirable to him. The final scene of the book shows Tarwater as agreeing that this bread of life is a good which he must pursue as reward. These earlier passages concerning Tarwater's attitudes towards this smell and food of Jesus are connected with the climatic passages, as the quotations show,

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3 Ibid., 434-5
4 The devil and the pervert have already been examined; see above, pp. 242-4.
5 O'Connor, The Violent, 443.
6 See above, pp. 274-5.
by the way Flannery O'Connor repeats exact wordings and thereby forces the reader to interpret the book as a symbolic whole. The close study of these earlier passages increases understanding of the thought-density in the climactic symbols, verifies the interpretation of climax symbols made in the previous chapter, and illustrates the way the climax grows organically out of the book as a whole.

In this early scene after the departure of the truant officer, even the particular manner in which Tarwater tries to evade his vocation is instructive. Tarwater "tried when possible to pass over these thoughts" about the "stinking shadow of Jesus and about Old Tarwater's mad" insatiable hunger for the bread of life. Tarwater's manner of avoiding the duties of his vocation is described in sight images that again remind the reader of how the sight symbolism, etc., functions in the book's climax.

Tarwater would try
to pass over these thoughts, to keep his vision located on an even level, to see no more than what was in front of his face and to let his eyes stop at the surface of that. It was as if he were afraid that if he left his eye rest for an instant longer than was needed to place something - a spade, a hoe, the mule's hind quarters before his plow, the red furrow under him - that the thing would suddenly stand before him, strange and terrifying, demanding that he name it and name it justly and be judged for the name he gave it. He did all he could to avoid this threatened intimacy of creation.
At this early point in the book Flannery O'Connor is signaling that the action of gazing steadily at an object is symbolically equivalent to going beneath the materialism of its finite surface to the pulsing, demanding vital quality of being that supplies true existence, a quality of being that all creation shares as a gift from the divine Giver of existence. This vital share in the divine being makes all created things intimate with one another, unites all things in a bond of love that wishes well for the being possessed in common by all things. Numerous other passages throughout the book suggest, often less directly, that direct steady gaze, especially if it is a gaze into another's eyes, is symbolically equal to the recognition of the divine vitality sacramentally present within matter. The gaze of the girl preacher, Lucette, for example, moves slowly from the fierce spotlight to Rayber's head and eyes. Her gaze remains on Rayber's face with a lowering concentration fixed on Rayber. Rayber feels, as a result, that Lucette sees directly into his heart, pierces his pretences, and sees the reality within:<br>Rayber "felt some miraculous communication between them. The child alone in the world was meant to understand him." Rayber has a problem similar to Tarwater's and seeks to avoid the divine call in the same way. Usually Rayber can live with Bishop without being painfully aware of his presence but the moments would still come when, rushing from some inexplicable part of himself, he would experience a love for the child so outrageous that
he would be left shocked and depressed for days, and trembling for his sanity. It was only a touch of the curse that lay in his blood.

His normal way of looking on Bishop was an x signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God, but that Bishop was he had no doubt. The little boy was part of a simple equation that required no further solution, except at the moment when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love. Anything he looked at too long could bring it on. Bishop did not have to be around. It could be a stick or a stone, the line of a shadow, the absurd old man's walk or a starling crossing the sidewalk. If, without thinking he lent himself to it, he would suddenly feel a morbid surge of the love that terrified him—powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely irrational and abnormal.

With Rayber as with Tarwater, steady gaze pierces through the pretences of finiteness and reaches the in-dwelling full-being that all creation shares with its Maker. A vision of this fullness of being creates an awareness of how all things are similar in the "image and likeness of God" and creates a moment of love.²

²O'Connor, The Violent, 315-6, 384, 372.

³Rayber's case is, however, slightly different from Tarwater's. If Rayber continues looking at Bishop long enough, the love will pass into a nausea and a belief that there is no God and no grounds for love. The reader is given here an example of Flannery O'Connor's notion that the extreme of reason alone and the extreme of emotion alone paradoxically convert into one another—sentimentalism equals obscenity. Thus Rayber lives a life of rigid discipline: "He did not look at anything too long, he denied his senses unnecessary satisfaction. He slept in a narrow iron bed, worked sitting in a straight-backed chair, ate frugally, spoke little, and cultivated the dullest for friends. At his high school he was the expert on testing. All his professional decisions were prefabricated and did not involve his participation." (O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, 373). Rayber's moments of love are merely the times when this excessive control of reason converts into an excess of emotion; if the steady gaze persists, Rayber is turned once again to an excess
Very frequently mention is made of how Tarwater's gaze avoids Bishop, grazes the top of Bishop's head and darts frantically from one thing to another. Rayber accuses Tarwater of being afraid to look Bishop in the eye and says that this is a major symptom of Tarwater's sickness. Eventually the story reaches a major turning point when Tarwater does finally stare deep into Bishop's eyes: Tarwater "seemed to see the little boy and nothing else, no air around, no room, no nothing, as if his gaze had slipped and fallen into the center of the child's eyes and was still falling down and down and down." The same kind of stare thereafter brings Tarwater into contact with his divine call and with the image of Old Tarwater, God's prophet and sacramental embodiment of the call - an image which Tarwater sees in Bishop, who has Old Tarwater's eyes. Most noteworthy is the time when Tarwater exchanges his sandwich for the drink of well water guarded by the group of Negro children. Tarwater

looked down into a gray clear pool, down and down to where two silent serene eyes were gazing at him. He tore his head away from the bucket and stumbled backwards while the blurred shack, then the hog; then the colored child, his eyes still fixed on him, came into focus. He slammed his hat down on his wet head and wiped his sleeve across his face and walked hastily away.

8 cont'd

of mere reason. Since Rayber's reason and emotions are not balanced - even he himself "was not deceived that this was a whole or full life" - his love is not real, nor is his steady gaze true. Thus the fact that Rayber's steady gaze eventually eliminates true being and love does no damage to the general interpretation being developed here.
Flannery O'Connor does not intend such visions to be taken merely literally: "The visions stuck like a burr in his head and it took him more than a mile to realize he had not seen it. The water had strangely not assuaged his thirst." Gazing at anything deeply is a symbol of the way a human can pierce the finiteness of matter and come into contact with God who can alone assuage any thirst, hunger or craving. It is interesting to see that both quotations emphasize the notion "deeply" by repeating it several times - thus insuring that the reader will interpret steady gaze as possessing more than literal importance - as a penetration beneath ordinary material surfaces. The same kind of stare reoccurs at the climax when Tarwater commits himself fully to his vocation after "his gaze rested finally on the ground where the wood entered the grave." Tarwater pierces beyond the material world: "nothing seemed alive about the boy but his eyes and they stared downward at the cross as if they followed below the surface of the earth to where its roots encircled all the dead." In the climax as in the earlier scenes, Flannery O'Connor uses the symbolism of steady gaze to indicate that a character sacramentally - through matter to spirit connected with matter - contacts the indwelling fullness of being and associates with all being in love. Thus the earthly Tarwater tries to reject this sacramental nature of the world which speaks of his religious calling. The young Tarwater "did all he could to avoid this threatened intimacy of creation."
When the Lord's call came, he wished it to be a voice from out of a clear and empty sky, the trumpet of the Lord God Almighty, untouched by any fleshy hand or breath. But later, the experienced Tarwater knows - and this symbolism of sight shows the awareness as does the previously discussed symbolism of smell and of hunger - that man contacts fullness of being not by avoiding but by going through the "fleshy hand." The present passage confirms the analysis made in the discussion of the climax that darting, shifting human activity is worthless if alone; man's final peace evolves out of a stillness that evokes concentrated focused action - the steady gaze.

An added point of connection between the imagery of sight and the imagery of hunger is realized when the reader observes that Flannery O'Connor mentions hunger for the bread of life - but that she emphasizes in this early passage, at the climax, and elsewhere, that Christ's miracle and the prophet's reward include multiplied fish as well as bread. For example, even in the middle of his conversation with Meeks, Tarwater has "a hideous vision of himself sitting forever with his great uncle on a green bank, full and sick, staring at a broken fish and a multiplied loaf." Much mention is made of fish throughout the story; Rayber attempts materialism and introduces Tarwater to his ancestor, the fish at a museum. Rayber and Tarwater go to

the country hotel to do some fishing. Tarwater is frequently compared to Jonah who was swallowed (it is emphasized) by a fish and vomited (further hunger imagery) on "the shores of the dead" so that he cannot escape his prophetic mission. Probably all these and other mentions of the fish imagery are significant in the ultimate pattern of the novel. The fish, like Flannery O'Connor's other symbols, has a paradoxical double meaning. It suggests materialism, since man can be descended from a mere fish, and since the way fish eat men and men eat fish can cause a man to reject the doctrine of a life after death or resurrection. But the fish, like any other evil in Flannery O'Connor's world, is eventually an agent of good. In forcing Jonah to accept his mission, the fish - it is called a "fish" rather than a whale - who can lead to the evil of materialism leads the prophet to his true destiny. Thus the fish-symbolism essentially suggests the divine - in fact, it is the same kind of symbol for Christ as is the "bread of life" which is also multiplied, especially at the climax of the book. One is reminded of the fact that the fish was just such a symbol - not sacramental as with the Eucharistic bread, however - of Christ in the days of the early Christians. With this realization, the reader is not surprised to find the clouds being "salmon-colored" as Tarwater goes to drown Bishop. Bishop will be drowned but also baptized; Christ has been present, working in evil. Most importantly, this
interpretation of the fish causes one to understand the significance of the frequent emphasis on the fact that Old Tarwater's and Bishop's eyes are fish-colored. The fish and, therefore, fish-colored eyes (since the eye is Flannery O'Connor's vehicle for knowing this world or what is beyond it - a symbol for use of the mind) is the agent of belief. Rayber points out this association: "I [Rayber] looked up and there he was, those mad fish-colored eyes looking down at me." "It was the eyes that got me . . . . Children may be attracted to mad eyes. A grown person could have resisted. A child couldn't. Children are cursed with believing." Again, Rayber fixes the association when he explains why he - and therefore, presumably, Tarwater too, who has the same difficulty - will not look at anything fixedly for too long a time. The fixed stare will bring on the sweep of over-powering superhuman love, and with it is "always felt . . . a rush of longing to have the old man's eyes - insane, fish-colored, violent with their impossible vision of a world transfigured - turned on him once again. The longing was like an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness." Thus, the scene in which Tarwater finally does stare fixedly into Bishop's eyes, which are the eyes of Old Tarwater, seems to be even more significant. Whenever Rayber or Tarwater look into Old Tarwater's or Bishop's eyes they come into the presence of the "violent," "impossible," world, a world that "appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all
demanding." The steady gaze into an eye, especially the sight of the fish in those eyes—and eventually these eyes are seen everywhere, even in the haze around the gospel preacher, in the well where Tarwater seeks a drink, and in the sun after Tarwater has been assaulted—those fish-eyes, like the bread, are another symbol of Christ and of Flannery O'Connor's sacramental outlook on life. Flannery O'Connor's use of the fish in the climax, therefore, has another web of meaning flowing throughout the texture of the novel.

In the present passage there is one other interesting evidence of Flannery O'Connor's sacramentalism: 'The importance of giving a thing its proper name. Tarwater is impressed by how awesome a duty it would be to have to give objects a fitting name; he is thus in the most intimate of contact with a thing, and he must "name it justly and be judged for the name he gave it." Evidently this is another case where Flannery O'Connor has made use of her Biblical myth. In Biblical times (and still today in a Semitic or Arabic culture) a name of a person or a

10 ibid., 340, 387, 432, 348, 399, 387, 324, 419, 404, 372.
11 ibid., 316.
thing was considered crucial. "From the earliest times the name given to a child was supposed to indicate some characteristic of the person; of the circumstances, trivial or momentous connected with his or her birth; of the hopes, beliefs, or feelings of the parents." With people and with objects these cultures had the "impression that the name and facts should correspond." Tarwater shares this sacramental philosophy that the external sign of an object (its name) has efficacy in establishing the function and value of that object (its fullness of real being). Tarwater, therefore is offended that city people rush by without really coming into contact with him: "he wanted to stop and shake hands with each of them and say his name was F. M. Tarwater." Contact with the name is contact with the reality. Thus Tarwater is offended when Rayber calls him "Franky." The boy insists that his real name is "Tarwater." Again, Tarwater writes his own name separately on the card at the fishing lodge and adds that he is not Rayber's son - Tarwater is again trying to use the uniqueness of his name to establish his unique real identity. Thus Tarwater's role in the passage cited here - like Adam's in the Garden of Eden - in giving proper names is a sharing in the intimacy of the act of creation: by getting the proper name one touches ultimate real being and joins matter and spirit sacramentally.

13 O'Connor, The Violent, 318, 368, 394.
Flannery O'Connor did not confine her sacramental use of names to this one allusion, however; she uses the practice herself. Tarwater's name, for example, has multiple significance and illustrates again both Flannery O'Connor's sacramentalism and the organic unity of the novel's symbolism. On the surface the name Tarwater suggests, of course, the strange name of the isolated Southern backwoods people - and the separation (a separation that is to their advantage, in Flannery O'Connor's philosophy) from the more "normal" names of those not so isolated. Tarwater's name, when broken into its components "Tar" and "water," remind the reader that this is a novel in which baptism, the use of water, is a crucial issue. The reader can see that Tarwater does indeed receive baptismal water of tar; he is baptised or converted to good only through the ugliness of sin (tar),¹⁴ which has a strong adhesiveness for the person it covers with grime. The reader is reminded of how Tarwater reaches good only by coming through the apex of evil, how man (in Flannery O'Connor's philosophy) sacramentally reaches the fullness of being only by passing through the attractive deceptiveness of lack-of-being-matter - the more ethereal (spirit, water) through the more solid (matter, tar). A further significance of Tarwater's name is the way it suggests the word "tares" and the Biblical parable of how the word of God takes root in some people like Tarwater but not in others like Rayber. Flannery O'Connor herself

¹⁴See earlier discussion of how good must emerge from evil, pp. 172-4.
justifies this interpretation by twice explicitly referring to this Biblical parable as one way of summarizing the conflict in the novel. In this very scene which we have been examining, Tarwater feels that the divine words he himself uttered to Rayber were "dry and seedless" and bore no fruit. More explicitly, Old Tarwater later emphasizes that Flannery O'Connor is thinking of the Biblical parable. Old Tarwater says to Rayber:

It was sass he got from them," the old man said. "Just parrot—mouthing all they had ever said about how I was a crazy man. The truth was even if they told him not to believe what I had taught him, he couldn't forget it. He never could forget that there were chances that that simpleton was not his only father. I planted the seed in him and it was there for good. Whether anybody liked it or not."

"It fell amongst cockles," Tarwater said.

"Say the sass."

"It fell in deep," the old man said, "or else after that crash he wouldn't have come out here hunting me."

And Rayber "admitted himself that the seed was still in him." The reference to "cockles," a word of Biblical connotation, and the discussion of how "deep" the seed fell suggest to the reader strong overtones of the Biblical parable. A scene more important because it applies this parable to Tarwater as well as to Rayber, and because it allows the reader to understand the full import of one of the sentences in the novel's climax, is the scene in which Rayber makes his most energetic and final attempt to reason with Tarwater. Tarwater replies:

"It's you the seed fell in," he said. "It ain't a thing you can do about it. It fell on bad ground but it fell in deep. With me," he said
proudly, "it fell on rock and the wind carried it away."

The school teacher grasped the table as if he were going to push it forward into the boy's chest. "Goddam you!" he said in a breathless harsh voice. "It fell in us both alike. The difference is I know it's in me and I keep it under control. I weed it out but you're too blind to know it's in you. You don't even know what makes you do the things you do."

The boy looked at him angrily, but said nothing. 15

The reference in this quotation to seed, bad ground, wind, and rock, compel the reader to recognize that Miss O'Connor is alluding to the Biblical parable of the tares.

Tarwater's analysis here does not quite fit the facts. The word has penetrated Tarwater more deeply than he here admits. Rayber's opinion is more accurate: Tarwater is a field that has a seed of the religious vocation and the tares (to use the Biblical term) that tend to choke such a vocation. Rayber has indeed weeded out much of the word instead of the tares, from the field of his own soul. One of the major problems of the book is to discover whether Tarwater will follow Rayber or whether Tarwater will remove the weeds and exchange the tares of sin for the water of baptism. The novel's climax develops this strand of symbolism when it indicates that Tarwater accepts the prophetic voice wherein the divine word is "as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood." Again, therefore, Flannery O'Connor has the climax being an outgrowth and summit of the web of verbal

nuance woven throughout the novel. During Old Tarwater's frenzy after the truant officer had left, Tarwater was afraid that this divine word might already have irrevocable control over him, that it had penetrated into "the darkest, most private part of his soul"; "he was secretly afraid . . . that it [the word, his vocation, Old Tarwater's hunger] might be passed down, might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood."16 As the novel progresses, Tarwater tries to live a life that would show that this seed of the word is not in him, that it has not ravished him.

Early in the book, Tarwater would prefer to think of himself as ravished by the physical world and uncontaminated by the spiritual - until the physical world literally, sexually does abuse him as had the materialist Raper-Rayber intellectually - and make him realize in the summit of evil that he is better off with the seed of God's word in his blood.17 Flannery O'Connor uses the explicit wording of the seed-parable to indicate Tarwater's struggle - here in this earlier frenzy, later in discussing the plight of Rayber and Tarwater, and finally in illustrating the direction of the action at the climax. Thus Tarwater's name is significant in telling the reader that the Biblical parable of the "tares" is what this novel discusses.

Tarwater's analysis that with himself the "seed fell on

16 Ibid., 447, 315.

17 See earlier references discussing how the wording of the passages about a "seed in the blood" are suggestive of evil and sexual abuse, pp. 256-275.
"rock" is not entirely faulty, however; there is in the statement one of Flannery O’Connor’s typical ironic second meanings, a deeper symbolic layer of meaning which makes Tarwater’s statement true in a certain sense. The Violent Bear It Away uses motif of a rock symbolically. The water of baptism into the fruitful religious life as prophet is to flow from a rock, Tarwater knows, just as it did for Moses. Flannery O’Connor reminds the reader of this Biblical significance of a rock by her frequent allusions to how Moses “struck water from a rock” as a sign of his prophetic office: Tarwater “thought of Moses who struck water from a rock, of Joshua who made the sun stand still, of Daniel who stared down the lions in the pit.” The coupling of Moses’ rock and Daniel’s lions, like the many references to these prophets throughout the book and in the climax scene, does more than suggest its usual motif of the man filled with the divine spirit, however. One of the strongest portents of the outcome of the novel occurs when Tarwater is tempted to baptize Bishop at a park pool where the water comes from the mouth of what is emphasized as a stone-lion. The rock is associated with Old Tarwater, and Tarwater’s first rebellion in his dislike in having to bury the mountain—Old Tarwater in a rock. Old Tarwater when challenged and filled with his sense of vision is a "rock-like figure" of massive heaviness and and unshakable steadiness (like the steady, focused movements discussed earlier).18 Flannery O’Connor interprets the rock image

18 O’Connor, The Violent, 400, 308, 390, 400-1, 316, 380.
on even more profound levels, however. Presumably, the rock is a symbol for the Church—recalling the name of "Peter" and the notion of the strong man of God as a rock on whom the Church is to be built. Probably the most telling connection between the rock and the Church comes through Bishop. Bishop's name shows that he somehow represents the Church—probably because like members of the Church he needs baptism, because he is made (as Rayber had admitted) in the image of God despite his defects, and because it is through Bishop that Tarwater eventually is to receive salvation. Bishop's name is thus significant in itself like Tarwater's name. It is also significant for its relationships with the notion of rock and Church. Bishop's characteristic pose is given as follows:

The child had on a black cowboy hat and he was gaping over the top of a trash basket that he clasped to his stomach. He kept a rock in it.

Tarwater looked at the closed door deliberately as if he continued to see the child through it, still clasping his trash basket. 19

Presumably this description, otherwise senselessly stressed in detail, is to be interpreted as a familiar O'Connor notion of good amidst evil, good emerging from evil. In the midst of "trash" is a rock; in the midst of the confusion and apparent uselessness of this world (in the presence even of Bishop himself whose uselessness causes rationalist Rayber to reject God),

This rock-like steadiness resembles the focused movement discussed earlier, e.g., pp. 260-1.
is the rock - giver of water and truth and grace. Thus it is appropriate that as the novel’s climax approaches, a rock should figure prominently in Tarwater’s “conversion.” The lady who sold pop has a “granite-like face”; even the reader who has not already been convinced that Flannery O’Connor is equating a rock with the Church as informed by the spirit of Christ must see here the significance of stone. “There was all knowledge in her stony face and the fold of her arms indicated a judgement fixed from the foundation of time.” This woman, it must be remembered, is the figure who starts Tarwater’s conversion because her rock-steady judgements condemning his actions cause him to utter the vulgarity which mounts to sexual abuse from the pervert and causes Tarwater’s final rejection of what he knows to be an obvious evil - fleshy, sexual language and abusive action. Again, as Tarwater returns to Powderhead, another rock faces him. Tarwater sees Buford “mounted on a mule. The mule was not moving; the two might have been made out of rock.” Buford’s steady condemning gaze that views Tarwater “with a scorn that can penetrate any surface” is what causes Tarwater to shift his eyes around and eventually face Old Tarwater’s grave and the final vision and acceptance that come as a consequence. For Flannery O’Connor, therefore, the rock motif signifies steadiness, and also it signifies any giver of grace, especially the Church.

20O’Connor, The Violent, 437.

21See pp. 266-275 where such sexual abuse is cited as the main element causing Tarwater’s conversion.

22O’Connor, The Violent, 445.
which brings men to goodness by allowing them to judge their own evil and finiteness against her divine standards - another multiple-image that Flannery O'Connor weaves throughout the book and into its climax. Thus, when Tarwater asserts that the seed found rock in him, he is incorrect as regards the tares parable; the seed has taken root within him. But in another sense he is ironically correct; the divine calling will be heeded by the divine anchor of truth which is within Tarwater causing him to eventually reject evil when it reaches its apex - causing Tarwater to reject the limited.

A final look at the word "tares" leads to another very likely significance of the name Tarwater. A tare is most precisely defined as follows: "Tares are certain kinds of darnel growing plentiful in corn fields. The bearded darnel . . . most resemble wheat. The seeds, often poisonous to human beings on account of parasitic growths in them, are sold as chicken's food." The fact that the word "tare" most specifically refers to seed makes it connect especially closely with Flannery O'Connor's use of "seed" in the passages referring to the kind of the divine word in human. The element of poison suggests the final possible interpretation of the word Tarwater.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the somewhat archaic word "tarwater" as an "infusion of tar in cold water,

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formerly in repute as a medicine." Its medicinal value was that it acted as a purgative, poisoning a person so that he would vomit substances harmful to him. "No remedy was more popular during the second half of the 18th century than tar-water."

Bishop Berkely wrote a whole treatise on the value of this purgative and felt that it was useful to prevent all sorts of evils, even felonies. This term serves as an obviously appropriate name for the character who must fight against the "gobbets of poison" wisdom of this material world and especially of the rationalist Rayber, the character who must literally vomit frequently as he struggles against the pains in his stomach because materialistic desires are in conflict with religious calling, the character who finally reaches appreciation and acceptance of his religious destiny through the sacramental discovery of good emerging from evil. Just as tarwater purges man of evil by giving him so great a poison that he is emptied and ready for good, so Tarwater must purge himself and through Tarwater the world must be purged of evil by having evil mount to the summit of evil and by being stilled into emptiness from inane human materialistic activity so as to be filled with the fullness of divine energy.

Other names in the novel also signify. Rayber's name is important. Critic Algene Ballif suggests that

24O'Conner, The Violent, 314.
Rayber's name means "raper." Ballif sees *The Violent Bear It Away* as a novel in which the dominant motif is symbolism of incest. Many passages throughout the novel suggest that Flannery O'Connor was occasionally using imagery of sexual perversion. The many passages in which Tarwater fears that Old Tarwater's "seed" has been planted in him can be read to have a double meaning in which "seeds" do not merely refer to the material produced by plants. This "Freudian interpretation" is enhanced when one observes passages indicating that Tarwater's birth was illegitimate, that Rayber baptizes Tarwater's bottom, that Old Tarwater's conversion of the child Rayber is called a "childhood seduction," that Old Tarwater feels that Rayber's charity to him is allowing Rayber to "creep into his soul," that Tarwater has a "ravaged look," when he revisits spots where he had been under Old Tarwater's control, and that the hunger which Old Tarwater has caused to rise in Tarwater leaves Tarwater "barely an inch in which to keep himself inviolate." Most significant is the climax in which the seeds are felt to be "opening one at a time" in Tarwater's "blood." Flannery O'Connor's use of Tarwater's obscenity to the lady selling pop and the use of the pervert is then not random or Jansenistic choices of an


27 Ballif makes the point that even the sexual abuse from the pervert is incestual, since the pervert seems to resemble the stranger-friend who is Tarwater's other self. Tarwater, in a sense,
evil with which to confront Tarwater; the literal sexual abuse which precipitates the novel's climax because Tarwater rejects such obvious evil\(^28\) is an organic part of the logical climax to a novel which occasionally describes Tarwater's struggle with his religious calling in the imagery of perversion.

This interpretation of Rayber's name seems to shed valid light on one level of significance in the novel. Even in other stories Flannery O'Connor symbolizes corruption of religion as sexual corruption. In "Good Country People," Mrs. Hopewell, who believes that the Bible was a thing to be kept in the bedroom, has her daughter seduced by the "naive" Bible salesman. Mrs. Shortley in "The Displaced Person" finds that Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother.\(^29\) The point seems to be that Tarwater must make his own deliberate, personal contact with the divine, a contact reached sacramentally through finding good emerging from the highest evil. Lack of

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\(^27\) cont'd

therefore, is violated by the evil from himself. The novel is to Ballif a struggle for Tarwater to find his self-identity in the face of such betrayal that tends to desecrate the love which he might find if he is to attain maturity. Ballif sees the incest and seduction imagery as very appropriate because a man who asserts materialistic self-sufficiency tries to abolish God and be his own creator - a kind of existential self-incest.

\(^28\) See earlier discussion of the climax of evil, as it produces good, pp. 266-275.

This vital contact results in only the forms of religion or the shell of a proper ethic, a corruption of Christ's Eucharistic and Incarnationalist divine love through the physical, a religion that is aptly symbolized by the corruption of love by sexual abuse. This perversion is an especially fitting symbol for Flannery O'Connor because her philosophy finds the communion of all in supreme love as the ultimate goal of religion—of all good action (if a less theological term is desired). Interpreting Rayber as a "raper" who is attempting to seduce Tarwater to the false "religion" of rationalism just as Old Tarwater is trying to pervade Tarwater with the true religion of prophecy is, however, slightly less certain than the many interpretations of Tarwater's name—because Flannery O'Connor never explicitly weaves together the contexts of Rayber and "raper" to let the reader verify the association.

One other interpretation of Rayber's name, however, is much more certain. Robert Drake suggests this symbolic meaning indirectly when he poses the parenthetic question: "Is the name as significant as Lucifer's?" Thus, one can argue that Rayber's name, like Tarwater's, should be broken into its components. "Ray" would be equivalent to the "Luci" or "Lux-Lucis" or Lucifer and signifying light. The element "ber" in Rayber's name suggests the English verb "to bear" just as the element "fer"

(from which the English verb "to bear" is derived) in Lucifer's name indicates the verb "fero" which means to "bear." Thus Rayber is a light-bearer or a Lucifer. The name would accord perfectly with Rayber's role in the conflict. Rayber is the one who tempts Tarwater away from the divine mission in which Old Tarwater has instructed Tarwater. Rayber is the ally with the stranger-friend since both Rayber and this stranger-friend insist that one need not concern himself with God and that this world of matter is the only thing of significance. Rayber is, therefore, playing the devil's role and his advice is identical with that of the stranger-friend, whom we have already identified with the devil.

31The fact that Rayber is the champion of materialism as well as of the false-light of rationalism is made obvious by such references as Rayber's insistence that the airplane is the greatest achievement of man, his insistence that the greatest glory of man is to stand alone, sturdy and without needing a divine crutch, and his description as a man with a "wired head," a head "run by electricity," a "mechanical heart," and the marvelous corkscrew invention. Tarwater on the other hand knows "everything but machines" (O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, 429, 455-466-467, 422, 436, 350). When Meeks shows Tarwater how to use the telephone, constant reference to the phone as "the machine" emphasizes the "made" scientific-rationalistic materialism of the object. When Tarwater views it as a "black coiled machine" (Ibid., 351-2) and thereby stresses its similarity to a snake-evil-devil, the reader has added explicit proof that Flannery O'Connor views machines as evil. Thus Rayber is evil in his rationalism, his materialism, his devotion to machines. Of course he also explicitly denies that there is a God.
The stranger-friend denies that Tarwater's conflict is between Jesus and the devil. "It's Jesus or you," he says.\(^{32}\) The stranger-friend-devil thus promotes the inflated importance of the self as opposed to a religious calling. Rayber promotes the same ethics when he encourages the affair between his sister, Tarwater's mother, and her lover. Rayber "got his sister this first and last lover because he thought it would contribute to her self-confidence." Rayber claims that "there is no Savior, but yourself." Rayber and the stranger-friend are allies in evil because both promote the deception of human self-sufficiency that is opposed to Flannery O'Connor's philosophy of the finiteness of this world. Again, the stranger-friend promotes the "golden-mean": in encouraging Tarwater to drink, the stranger-friend says "in a softer tone" that "a little" swallow "won't interfere. Moderation never hurt no one." Rayber also practices extreme asceticism to keep "himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall on the side of his choice."\(^{33}\) Rayber and the stranger-friend are allies in evil because both promote the notion of balance while Flannery O'Connor sees such moderates as lukewarm defenders of the materialistic status-quo, unable to act.

\(^{32}\) Also, for identification of the stranger-friend as the devil, see pp. 272-274.

(as Tarwater frequently insists). These moderates ignore the fullness of being surging to focused powerful action beneath the surface of matter's limited inertness, people who forget that "the violent bear it away."

Curious added evidence that Rayber is to be associated with Lucifer comes from several references to Rayber in terms of the Garden of Eden. When Rayber and his future wife leave Powderhead after failing to regain Tarwater, they make a snake's "disappearing rattle in the corn." Tarwater can never quite remember what Rayber looks like—before or after staying with Rayber—and the explanation given is that "the schoolteacher, like the devil, could take on any look that suited him." Again, when Tarwater could posit a stable picture of Rayber, he sees Rayber's eyes as "dark gray, shadowed with knowledge, and the knowledge moved like tree reflections in a pond where far below the surface shows a snake may glide and disappear." Again Rayber is the snake; the reference about shadows of knowledge suggests the shadow of the tree of knowledge in Eden. If the association of Rayber as "raper" is valid, finally, Rayber is equated with the pervert whom we have also seen to be a figure of Satan. Opposed to Rayber's false light of mere reason is the child-preacher, "Lucette," whose name also signifies light, true

\[34^{Ibid., 308, 336.}\]
light this time.

A final name of significance is "Meeks," who is less important for himself than for his place in the pattern of the book. The name "Meeks" suggest not the virtue of meekness or humility so much as the fault of timidness. It is the opposite of that violence which is the trait of goodness. Mr. Meek's lack of violence appears mainly as defective love — an issue which must be given more consideration than it has yet received in this analysis. Mr. Meeks insists to Tarwater that "love was the only policy that worked 95% of the time." But Meeks does not display real love. He loves for personal gain; "the salesman said it had been his personal experience that you couldn't sell a copper flue to a man you didn't love." His love is the mechanical keeping of records; he turns people into statistics in a book, just as he does Rayber. Meeks felt that this need for love was supplemented by one other great natural law; the need for a human's own efforts alone. Meeks befriends Tarwater because he hopes to hire Tarwater as efficient cheap labor. Flannery O'Connor rejects this faulty love as not vigorous enough for true love. Its self-serving, planned, self-sufficient, cause-and-effect quality is not the spontaneous, all-embracing, inexplicable fire that blazes furiously with its focused radiance into a violence that is not of this world. Meeks is properly one who can say, "I come from Mobile"\textsuperscript{35} — for Meeks is a mobile, circular, 

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}, 333, 336.
self-contained being whose reliance on human effort alone and whose vision of a love that is merely of this world lacks roots like those Tarwater saw piercing through this material world at old Tarwater's grave — a love that lacks prophetic vehemence enabling it to burn clean human limits so that man can reach a true love that lacks limits.

Meeks has more than personal significance. A rather obvious pattern in the novel is that Meek's distorted love and his mobileness (rather than the steady focused vibrancy of true prophetic love's violence) is duplicated in the other two drivers who give Tarwater rides. In fact the quality of love grows worse as the novel progresses from one driver to another. Here, too, evil progresses to its apex. The truck driver does not even make Meek's pretense of trying to do something for Tarwater as a genuine favor. He flaunts openly the fact that he is using Tarwater; "I ain't picking you up to do you a favor," says the driver. "You got to keep me awake or you don't ride." The fact that this driver is to be compared with Meeks as another example of improper "love" is emphasized by the almost sarcastic word "buddy" which the driver uses in addressing Tarwater and by the fact that Flannery O'Connor has Tarwater read the card containing Meek's address and offer of help while Tarwater is in the truck.\(^\text{36}\) Both Meeks and the truck driver, however, appear in a soft light in comparison with Tarwater's third driver, the per-

\(^{36}\text{Ibid., 427-30.}\)
vert - a man who does not disguise his improper love, who does not offer advice or even an unwanted sandwich, but a man who frankly tries to use Tarwater completely for mere physical pleasure. The climatic scene's emphasis on how Tarwater's prophetic destiny involves a loving gathering of everyone in roots that "encircled all the dead" and its concern for the children of God is an apt outgrowth of this motif of love, ignored by other analyses of the novel.

Of minor additional importance, finally, is Flannery O'Connor's use of the automobile. When Tarwater is driven somewhere, he is engaged in evil or at least in materialism. As already has been mentioned, this motif grows as an offshoot from Flannery O'Connor's three patterns of circular spurring action, stillness, and steadily focused vigorous divine violence. The pattern, as it applies to travel, is heightened by having Meeks come from Mobile, by Rayber's endorsement of the airplane as man's greatest invention - facts already noted - and by Meek's endorsement of the wheel as the "greatest invention of man." The truck driver, moreover, has an "auto-transit truck, huge and skeletal, carrying four automobiles packed in it," and he operates from a capital of mobility equal to that of Meeks - Detroit. One is reminded of what is perhaps Flannery O'Connor's most forceful use of this car-mobility imagery in the short story "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." Mr. Shiftlet (Shiftless), who gives a discourse on how the human heart and its loves cannot be known
to mere materialistic scientists, points out the symbolism: "Lady, a man is divided into two parts, body and spirit . . . . A body and a spirit," he repeats. "The body, lady, is like a house; don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like an automobile; always on the move, always." Mr. Shiftlet too has Mobile for his goal. The story indicates that a man with a roving, flicking, shiftless spirit — that is, a man with cars as his God instead of a real spirit — is an untrustworthy, unloving man who despite his pious sayings coldly abandons the idiot-bride he has married for money. Flannery O'Connor's ideal, as the climax of *The Violent Bear It Away* shows, is focused vivid action, not Mr. Shiftlet's and the auto world's constant shifting. For Flannery O'Connor, the car and Mobile, ruthless shiftlessness, is a frequent symbol of the materialist in love with only this world and self-advantage. It contrasts with Tarwater's final vision of how true love's "roots encircled all the dead." The passage in which Flannery O'Connor describes Old Tarwater's frenzy and Tarwater's reactions after the truant officer leaves, therefore, both in itself and in the issues to which it gives rise, sheds considerable light on this novel's patterns of symbols and on the way in which the novel's climax is an organic

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38 Ibid., 446
outgrowth of the texture of the whole book. In a novel with such closely-worded intense poetic density as this, further and further implications of texture can be found in this passage as in most scenes of the book. For example, considerable mention is made of the "head" as an obvious sign of Rayber's rationalism. Flannery O'Connor's symbolism of circular pointless movement is seen in Old Tarwater's repetitions of Rayber's accusations; such pointless erroneous anger is contrasted with genuine religious feeling that follows and is symbolized by having Old Tarwater's voice "straining ahead of his heavy body to be off." The weight image also appears in this passage as representative of matter's conflict with spirit. Burning is mentioned several times - especially in the passage that proclaims that "even the mercy of the Lord burns." Tarwater is seen looking "off into the distance," as if he is seeking that foreign country which is the true home of the prophet.\(^{39}\) All these images do figure in the texture of the entire novel and do reappear, as has been seen, in the climax. Since it is not the purpose of this investigation to give a complete explanation of the novel, however, no detailed attention will be given to such matters here. This discussion will merely indicate how the web of texture in the book grows out into the organic climax. This discussion can now turn, therefore, to other passages which offer significant

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 314-5
specific examples of Flannery O'Connor's thought and
"incarnationalist technique."

The passage in which Rayber listens to Lucette's sermon
is woven closely into the texture of the novel; it sheds light
especially on Flannery O'Connor's sacramentalism and on the
neglected motif of love.

As Lucette appears in the church's spotlight, Rayber
becomes enraged because he thinks her to be exploited. He has
rejected all religion. He is agitated by the speeches introduc-
ing Lucette because these speeches are taking religion serious-
ly. Rayber is hurt even by these introductory speeches because
he has not really removed the "seeds of belief" which Old Tar-
water had planted in him. As he listens to the introduction,
he reviews the time when Old Tarwater had abducted and instruct-
ed him. Finally, Rayber ceases being disturbed; "he felt a
relief from his pain" when he recognized that Lucette's parents
are not serious about religion and were "only after money." "He
could hear the beginning clink of coins falling in a plate."
But this moment of peace is soon lost as Lucette herself appears.
Again Rayber sees a person serious, intense, and violent about
religion; again he is disturbed by the "undertow" of belief
surging within "his blood dragging him backward to what he knew
to be madness" - a tendency here momentarily loosened from his
restrictive anti-religious asceticism. This time Rayber's
agitation is even more extreme because he considers that Lucette is being exploited financially by her parents, just as he had been exploited (spiritually) by Old Tarwater. It is ironical to see Rayber angered that someone is using people rather than existentially reverencing the sacredness of the individual - curious because of the way Rayber had likewise "used" Old Tarwater for the magazine article, because of the way Rayber needs Bishop so he can retain his own atheistic balance, and because of the way Rayber blows hot and cold in responding to Tarwater's needs, presumably because Rayber is also using Tarwater selfishly to be an alternate for the normal son and indeed the normal self which he himself had never had. More than once Rayber "gazed through" what to him was really "the actual insignificant boy \[\text{Tarwater}\] before him to an image of him that he held fully developed in his mind," in fact seeing not Tarwater at all, but "seeing himself so clearly in the face before him that he might have been beseeching his own image." Rayber's thoughts just preceding the sermon, therefore, suggest that the dominant motif of this section is to be the issue of true and false love and the relationship between love (respect for personality and the spiritual commitment to another's fullness of being) and the grasping after gain that characterizes materialism.

Flannery O'Connor increases the density of meaning gathering about these poles here; in summarizing Rayber's grief at how the presence of Lucette's true belief recalls the

40 Ibid., 361, 372, 357, 367.
at how the presence of Lucette's true belief recalls the religious ideals he has stunted within himself and his grief at the lack of love shown by exploitive selfishness, she says that Rayber "felt the taste of his own childhood pain laid on his tongue like a bitter wafer." In a novel so concerned with symbolism of hunger and especially with hunger for the Eucharistic bread of life, this is a telling image which directly supports the earlier contention that the Eucharistic symbolism used the bread of life as the sacrament of love. Thus at the precise moment when the novel most explicitly addresses itself to love—in Rayber's reflections and in Lucette's sermon—Miss O'Connor subtly reminds the reader that this love is best exemplified in the Eucharist. Rayber's experience of love quite properly reminds him (subconsciously—by means of the image through which he psychologically perceives his pain) of the Eucharistic wafer—bitter, however, because Rayber's only experience with love (in his childhood, in his own present practice, and in the example of Lucette's parents) has been with the false love of materialism, the selfish love that seeks gain. Presumably this Eucharistic overtone explains why the last major incident previous to the Church sermon was the time Tarwater stopped and stared in the bakery window because of his hunger, basically his unrecognized hunger for the Eucharistic "bread of life." 41 Here and throughout the novel this Eucharistic symbolism is most apt—once the

41 Ibid., 382, 378.
reader realizes how central the motif of love is. In the Eucharist, Flannery O'Connor can best illustrate her sacramental personalism and incarnationalism. The sacrament is an outward sign that effects what it signifies; that is, the sacrament is matter not separated from spirit or aggregated with spirit, but matter which itself effects changes in the non-material. It is limited being embodying fullness of being. In particular the Eucharist stands as the primary sacrament in this regard, because it is viewed in addition as the Being of God incarnated in the flesh of Christ's Body, which is in turn "incarnated" in the matter of the Eucharistic species. Because it is thus a thing of unity, the Eucharist gets its title as the sacrament of love. Moreover, the appropriateness of these reflections is assured by the fact that the very next paragraph of text starts Lucette's sermon. It is a sermon on the fact of the Incarnation and thus another layer of association increasing the density of meaning. Flannery O'Connor, therefore, weaves together into a complex web of symbolism the following strands of meaning: (1) Rayber's reflections on how love should crave unity of goal between the lovers, and not separated selfish gain which disjoins matter and spirit by seeking material gain; (2) the notion of sacrament which has matter endowed with spirit in a union; (3) the Eucharist, which adds to the sacramental signification its own extra notions about love, causing matter and spirit so to unite that God appears as man; (4) the actual facts of the historical (as
opposed to the sacramental, Eucharistic) Incarnation with its message of loving union in the fullness of being.42

As if to make the reader feel justified in viewing the references to Christmas and to the Incarnation as part of this symbolic pattern, and as if to assure that such is the proper interpretation of this pattern, Flannery O'Connor uses Lucette's sermon (with its chance to speak directly about religious matters) to expand these notions explicitly. Since the essential lines of thought have already been made clear both in the previous explanations and in this study's treatment of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy, only some of the most important passages (in this quite lengthy sermon) will be examined here. Lucette gets to the point immediately. She cries

Do you know who Jesus is? . . . Jesus is the word of God and Jesus is love. The Word of God is love and do you know what love is, you people? If you don't know what love is, you won't know Jesus when he comes. You won't be ready. I want to tell you people the story of the world, how it never known \sic\ when love comes, so when love comes again, you'll be ready . . . Listen to me, you people . . . God was angry with the world because it always wanted more. It wanted as much as God had and it didn't know what God had but it wanted more and more. It wanted God's own breath, it wanted His very Word and God said, "I'll make my Word Jesus, I'll give them My Word for a king, I'll give them my very breath for theirs."43

This passage illustrates the same conflict between false and true love illustrated in Rayber's previous talks, except that

42 The notion of the "word" and the "breath" or spirit explained below also fits into this series.
43 O'Connor, The Violent, 382
Flannery O'Connors now has that conflict universalized to apply to the whole world. The world wants more and more. It is selfish. It is interested materialistically in greater quantities. It even craves part of God himself. Ironically, God wants the world to have Himself - but not in a materialistic quantitative sense. The actual divine love acceding to these outrageous requests stands in contrast to such selfishness. The notion of the finite world allied with the divine in the Incarnation of Jesus is made explicit. Further, Flannery O'Connor has Lucette use the traditional Biblical images of the "Word" and "Breath." These are traditionally the two best Biblical symbols for the notion of incarnation or sacramentalism, which has been seen to be the summit of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy. These two images are best for the following reasons. Words are material things, pulsations of matter that affect the ear as sound, yet they effect a spiritual result - the idea they convey. Since a word is itself a kind of "sacrament," the notion of the "Word" has been used since St. John's Gospel as a synonym for God incarnated in Jesus because of a loving desire that all may be one: "The word was made flesh and dwells among us."  

44 John 1:1.
material because air is the least material of matter, and because air as breath is a sign of life, which illustrates inert matter throbbing with non-material vital being. Thus, even etymologically the word breath is derived from the word "spiritus," which is the source of our present word to describe non-material being or "spirit."

The sermon continues with unnaturally emphasized repetition of the word "Word." The story of Christmas is given as Lucette continues:

"The world said, 'How long, Lord, do we have to wait for this?' And the Lord said, 'My Word is coming, my Word is coming from the house of David, the king.'" She paused and turned her head to the side, away from the fierce light. Her dark gaze moved slowly until it rested on Rayber's head in the window. He stared back at her. Her eyes remained on his face for a moment. A deep shock went through him. He was certain that the child had looked directly into his heart and seen his pity. He felt that some mysterious connection had been established between them.

"'My Word is coming,'" she said, turning back to face the glare, "'my Word is coming from the house of David, the king.'"

She began again a dirge-like tone. "Jesus came on cold straw. Jesus was warmed by the breath of an ox. 'Who is this?' the world said, 'who is this blue-cold child and this woman, plain as the winter? Is this the Word of God, this blue-cold child? Is this His will, this plain winter-woman?"

"Listen you people!" She cried, "The world knew in its heart, the same as you know in your hearts and I know in my heart. The world says, 'Love cuts like the cold wind and the will of God is plain as the winter. Where is the summer will of God? Where are the green seasons of God's will? Where is the spring and summer of God's will?'"
The sermon goes on to describe the suffering of the Holy Innocents and the passion of Christ and His further glorification in which all matter will act in consort.

"They nailed Him to a cross and run a spear through His side and then they said, 'Now we can have some peace, now we can ease our minds.' ... Listen world ... Jesus is coming again! The mountains are going to lie down like hounds at His feet, the stars are going to perch on His shoulder and when He calls it, the sun is going to fall like a goose for His feast. Will you know the Lord Jesus then? The mountains will know Him and bound forward, the stars will light on his head, the sun will drop down at his feet, but will you know the Lord Jesus then?"

Here Flannery O'Connor continues to make explicit the reference to the historical Incarnation. She begins at this point to move away from the aspect of the Incarnation as love and passes to the aspect of suffering and denial in the expression about how love cuts and is like a winter season in which man's will must be disciplined to accept the things of God rather than of his own emotional pleasures. With her eyes "fixed on" Rayber, Lucette continues the sermon:

"I've seen the Lord in a tree of fire! The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean!" She was moving in his Rayber's direction. The people in front of her forgotten. Rayber's heart began to rage. He felt some miraculous communication between them. The child alone in the world was meant to understand him Lucette's sermon of love is reaching the loveless Rayber. "Burn the whole world, man and child," she cried, her eye on him, "none can escape!" She stopped a little
distance from the end of the stage and stood silent, her whole attention directed across the small room to his face on the ledge looking in through the window. Her eyes were large and dark and fierce. He felt that in the space between them, their spirits had broken the bonds of age and ignorance (and mere matter) and were mingling in some unheard of knowledge of each other. He was transfixed by the child's silence. Suddenly she raised her arm and pointed toward his face. "Listen you people," she shrieked, "I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word!" 47

Thus Flannery O'Connor weaves into this passage suggestions, examined earlier, of how God's Word will burn a person clean.

Miss O'Connor's whole philosophy, therefore, passes under review here: through the experience of evil, through experience of the limited, man comes into contact with fullness of being and finds his own identity in losing himself into the loving unity of "mingling" with others - a mingling that disregards body and distance and separation and matter, a mingling of spirits based on a physical love in Incarnation.

Lucette's ending brings the basic conflict into focus once again. She cries, "Be saved in the Lord's fire or perish in your own!" 48 - the Lord on one's self, as Rayber and the stranger-friend-devil had earlier indicated to Tarwater. The moral evil of Herod, of the crucifiers, and of the unprepared world in general as well as ontological evil of limitedness - in

47 Ibid., 384-5

48 Ibid., 385
the passages about how the mountains and stars and things of matter will shake off their limitedness in the presence of God-incarnated-in-matter — eventually must figure into this grand transformation whereby the summit of fullest being's good emerges from evil. Eventually the sermon swings back to Rayber, where it began, so that the reader is again forced to see that Rayber's evil and his whole experience are to be read into this passage, as well as the world's evil. Thus with extra ironic appropriateness, Lucette refers to Rayber's evil as deafness to the Word — appropriate because of Rayber's mechanical ear-device, his material and his real deafness.

Miss O'Connor adds one final touch. This chapter ends with Rayber selfishly ignoring his one chance to make genuine loving contact with Tarwater at a time when Tarwater most needs help. When Tarwater and Rayber start home, Tarwater "raised his arm in an uncertain gesture of greeting. The sight of Rayber seemed to afford him relief amounting to rescue. Rayber's face had the wooden look it wore when his hearing aid was off (he will not make contact with the God whom Lucette pictured as trying to reach him with the Word, and he will not make contact with the God-in-another, Tarwater). He did not see the boy's expression of awe. His rage obliterated all but the general line of his figure." Rayber does not respect Tarwater's person in itself. "Through his fury he could not discern that for the first time the boy's eyes were submissive." Though Rayber can "have put his
hand on the shoulder next to his and it would not have been withdrawn... he made no gesture. His head was turning with old rages." Tarwater lingers at Rayber's bedroom door expecting the usual invitation to enter and friendly conversation of consolation. "The next day, too late he [Rayber] had the sense of opportunity missed." Rayber refuses to learn the lesson of love and is too concerned about himself and his old "rages." He hears the Word of God neither in Lucette, in the world, nor in Tarwater. He neglects this chance to show true love for Tarwater and to accomplish his goal of friendliness with Tarwater because his own suppressed religion seemed to be "stirring from buried depths that had lain quiet for years and to be working upward, closer and closer toward the slender roots of his peace." The sermon passage, therefore, is very useful because Flannery O'Connor here has a chance to discuss religious ideas explicitly without authorial intrusion. She also continues to use her method of indirectly shaping the theme through the symbolic image pattern. The motifs of love and sacramentalism, neglected by critics of Flannery O'Connor, are emphasized in this passage, and Miss O'Connor's whole philosophy is seen openly. The scene provides powerful evidence that a proper judgment was made earlier in this discussion when the novel's climax was analyzed, and the scene illustrates well the novel's texture organically prepared for that climax.
One final passage from the novel will be analyzed. Throughout earlier passages of the book, Flannery O'Connor frequently shows a character staring out into the distance. Usually, as in the passage just discussed, this staring comes when a character is seeing religious values or at least some values other than those of the materialistic here-and-now. The stare serves as a device whereby Flannery O'Connor can shift from the narrative present to something more abstract without endangering her point of view as she tells her story, and the stare serves as a realistic trigger whereby a character's stream of consciousness shifts in associations and arrives at a level of meaning deeper than that suggested by the narrative flow.

As the end of the novel approaches, however, the distance is given another or at least a more explicit meaning. For example, as Rayber and Tarwater approach Cherokee Lodge, they are bombarded with materialism. The Lodge is at the edge of a better world; it is at the edge of a world of absolutes - at the edge of a world that has a firm skyline and dense wood, where the mobile world of matter fades into insignificance before the mysteries of the immense and absolute which dwarf man's pettiness. Tarwater's nose further identifies this forest as the good which he is trying to flee because his nose perceives the "familiar odor moving from the pine across the lake." This

\[49\text{Ibid.}, 315.\]
is a picture, however, of only "one end" of the lodge; on the other hand, the long front side of the building, plastered with beer and cigarette signs, faces the highway, which runs about thirty feet away across the dirt road and beyond a narrow stretch of "iron weed." The lodge is at the border of the two worlds - the world of the absolute and the world of materialism, which is here indicated by gaudy, "cheap" signs littering the beauty of the landscape with their appeals to men grasping for emotional escape. It is significant that drinking and smoking comprise the content of the materialistic litter, moreover, since these are the two evils which Old Tarwater had indicated as signs of the devil and which Tarwater must ultimately face in the pervert. The contrast of the soft, dirt road to the "iron weed" is worth noting also; the contrast may not deliver much meaning in itself, but it fits into the general symbolic context and exemplifies a contrast Flannery O'Connor frequently pictures in the novel. The humble worthlessness of dirt, dust, the earth, seems frequently to suggest goodness, perhaps because it is opposed to the artificial (and therefore false) man-made world of materialistic machines and metal. Dust or dirt at times seems to take on connotations suggesting that it even symbolizes life, and, thus, the inviolable human person and the spirit of full-being incarnated in the world of matter and especially in the body-soul of man. There are suggestions that man is made from dust and shall return to dust. Just as Tarwater is about
to drown Bishop, the devil-stranger-friend adds, as a final temptation, this thought: "Make haste, he said. Time is money and money is like blood and time turns to dust." Again limited materialistic time (which changes and ends), haste, need to worry about selfish gains, and money, is contrasted with spiritual values such as Bishop's life (which is under discussion here) and the religious values Bishop stands for - life and love and concern for others as symbolized by blood, and dust. Dirt or dust is especially the most common factor stressed whenever Flannery O'Connor describes Powderhead. Thus, in this passage, the "iron weed" suggests an evil thing of metal and the evil "weed" or tares located alongside the humble dust. The lodge is at the border between these two poles of conflict.

The issue of distance comes to the reader's attention in an unusual way in the next paragraph. The contrast between metal and the immaterial beauty of nature has just been defined as possibly the difference between the city and the country. The reader is reminded of one other time when Flannery O'Connor was specifically discussing city versus country. When Rayber's father came to Powderhead to claim Rayber after Old Tarwater had kidnapped the boy, Rayber began the following conversation with his uncle, Old Tarwater: "He's going to take me back with him," Rayber said. And later Rayber's father tells Rayber that they are going "back to the real world, boy... back to the real

50 Ibid., 394, 393, 431.
world. And that's me and not him, see?" Flannery O'Connor weaves together several strands of connotation here. These two passages suggest that city and country are to be seen as part of the book's concern with the real and false world, with materialistic and the spiritual - with the reality that is off in the distance and the here-and-now. Against this web of association, Flannery O'Connor's ensuing imagery (in the passage being examined) stands as significant. As the car approaches the Cherokee Lodge, Rayber pictures Tarwater "sitting as usual on his side of the car like some foreign dignitary who would not admit speaking the language - the filthy hat, the stinking overalls, worn defiantly like a national costume."51 This passage and the passage in which Rayber's father comes to Powderhead are the first two times when Flannery O'Connor becomes very specific about the symbolism of the "foreign country," which she had hitherto (in this novel) been content to suggest merely by those strange gazes off into the distance. From this point on, the references to a foreign country and to the "displaced person" become more frequent and more specific, but the basic significance

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51Ibid., 380-1, 393.
of these references has been suggested here. The foreign country is the kingdom of heaven or the world of spiritual value which is being described in the traditional Biblical way as a world that is essentially mysterious and "other" than this material world.

Parenthetically, this passage is interesting as the one place where Flannery O'Connor seems to comment on hats. Every single character in the novel has a hat which is very precisely described and emphasized by frequent repetition. Miss O'Connor stresses hats in all her stories. The present passage suggests that the hat is a sign of a person's allegiance to the

52 The reader should also note that this strand of imagery does not appear from nowhere and float its isolated way through the final passages of the novel. This imagery of a foreign country has already been suggested by the many passages that vaguely hint at some special significance of a second world seen when one gazes off into the distance. It is also very closely allied with the dense pattern of mobility versus fixedness, which runs throughout the book. The relationship between gazing into the distance, mobility, and the foreign country is brought out by such references as the following. When Tarwater meets Bishop, "his black pupils, glassy and still, reflected depth on depth his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking, mad shadow of Jesus" (O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, 357). Further passages early in the novel hinting at a special importance for the idea of distance and the foreign country are the play on the word "stranger," the emphasis on how possible messengers must circle the world with their religious message and indeed how even Jesus had to flee to Egypt with His Incarnation's blending of two worlds (Lucette's sermon, pp. 378-383), and Rayber's rushing around the city taking Tarwater to restaurants "run by a different color of a foreigner" to show the spirit-hungry boy "how other nationalities ate" (p. 399).

The reader should also note that in other stories Flannery O'Connor frequently uses the motif of the foreign
non-material world or to the prophet's world. It is an article that comes from the land of the foreign country, not from this world. Tarwater's insistence on wearing his hat all the time, even when swimming from Rayber's boat, would thus be a symbolic indication that the prophetic "seed" is deeply implanted in him as a habit of faith not easily removed. It would be a sign of the religious side of Tarwater's character which fights against the rejection of the divine calling and which imitates what Flannery O'Connor herself said of Old Tarwater - that "I wanted to get across the fact that the great uncle Old Tarwater is the Christian - a sort of crypto-Catholic - and that the school teacher Rayber is the typical modern man. The boy young

country. Her most explicit statement comes in "The Displaced Person," where the foreigner is equated with Christ (and his country therefore with Christ's world). Says Mrs. McIntyre, "As far as I'm concerned, Christ was just another D.P. / Displaced Person/" (O'Connor, "The Displaced Person" in Three, Signet, New American Library, New York, 1964, p. 294).

A brief discussion of these hats is given by Stanley Edgar Hyman in Flannery O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 28. Like most of Flannery O'Connor's critics to date, however, Mr. Hyman merely mentions that hats are a frequently recurring device in Flannery O'Connor's stories. He makes little effort to interpret the meaning of this symbol.
Tarwater has to choose which one, which way he wants to follow. It's a matter of vocation. The hat is naturally part of Tarwater and (less prominently) of all men, a habit of faith not easily shed. It is quite fitting that the hat be chosen as the symbolic residue of faith because it is the article which covers man's head - symbolically seen in this novel to be the prime symbol of rationalistic materialism and self-sufficient rejection of man's limitedness. With such an interpretation, Rayber's final decision about Tarwater has strong significance. While Tarwater is in the boat with Bishop and about to drown the boy, Rayber decides that either he is going to break with Tarwater and cease concerning himself with him, or Tarwater is going to have to submit to sharper discipline from Rayber. Specifically, Rayber is going to present a three-fold ultimatum. Tarwater may stay on condition "not that you begin to cooperate, but that you cooperate, fully and completely, that you change your attitude, that you allow yourself to be tested, that you prepare yourself to enter school in the fall." Most importantly, Tarwater must show immediate good faith by meeting the third requirement: "that you take that hat off your head right now and throw it out the window into the lake. If you can't meet these requirements, then Bishop and I are leaving by ourselves." Symbolically, Flannery

54 O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 72.
55 O'Connor, The Violent, 421.
O'Connor shows that Rayber's materialism can be successful only if Rayber can separate Tarwater from this hat which is Tarwater's pledge of religion and which therefore receives an undue emphasis in this series of conditions.

Flannery O'Connor's next and longest reference to the motif of the foreign country comes when Tarwater feels the mounting certainty that he must do something at the Lodge to bring his faith to a climax. Here the foreign country is more strongly woven together with the other major imagery of the novel. It is identified with silence, emptiness, nothingness, and absence of being.

Ever since his first night in the city when he had seen once and for all that the school teacher was of no significance - nothing but a piece of bait, an insult to his intelligence - his mind had been engaged in a continual struggle with the silence that confronted him, that commanded he baptize the child and begin at once the life the old man had prepared for him.

It was a strong waiting silence. It seemed to lie all around him like an invisible country whose borders he was always on the edge of, always in danger of crossing. From time to time as they had walked in the city he had looked to the side and had seen his own form along side him in a store window, transparent as a snake's skin. It moved beside him like some violent ghost who had already crossed over and was reproaching him from the other side. If he turned his head the opposite way there would be the dim-witted boy, hanging on to the schoolteacher's coat, watching him. His mouth hung in a lopsided smile but there was a judging sternness about his forehead. The boy never looked lower than the top of his head except by accident for the silent country appeared to be reflected again in the center of his eyes. It stretched out there limitless and clear.

56 Ibid., 398.
The foreign country of silence and emptiness is associated thus with Bishop, with Old Tarwater, and with the religious side of Tarwater's conflict. The reader may be confused by seeing that world of greater reality associated with terms denoting emptiness and lack of being; but this momentary confusion is eliminated when one realizes that in Flannery O'Connor's symbolism the world of spiritual reality can be described in one sense as an emptiness because it is the reality which exists unlimited, beyond a finiteness where this material world is empty. The foreign country is associated with emptiness of hunger, when Tarwater realizes that "since the breakfast he had finished sitting in the presence of his uncle's corpse, he had not been satisfied by food, and his hunger had become like an insistent silent force inside him, a silence akin to the silence outside, as if the grand trap left him barely an inch to move in, barely an inch in which to keep himself inviolate."\(^{57}\) The reader is reminded that the great prophets did not think that the world of truth was foreign; they considered it their home. Flannery O'Connor weaves in references about how Jonah and Elijah were themselves wandering into the evil world which had to hear their message.

Further passages confirm the notion that Miss O'Connor's references to strange otherness of the mysterious force is the strangeness of a foreign country. As he returns to Powderhead, Rayber feels that he is approaching the "entrance to a region he

\(^{57}\textit{Ibid.}, 399.\)
would enter at his peril." Powderhead is not just a farm but a region-nation, alien and able to command sovereign allegiance; "the forest rose above him, mysterious and alien" - it was an alien or foreign world of silence where the "trees stood rising above him, majestic and aloof, as if they belonged to an order that had never budged from its first allegiance in the days of creation." Clearly the forest and the foreign country are a world of permanence different from the world of mobility and cars. Again after the drowning Tarwater tells the truck driver that he is returning to Powderhead where "no voice will be uplifted," and though Powderhead's ground feels strange to him Tarwater feels thankful that by rejecting religion he has met the challenge of "the clear gray borders of the country he had saved himself from crossing into." Tarwater's deep-seated Christian tendency is not so easily lost, however. Even as he is thinking about how he saved himself from his prophetic calling and can now live alone and for himself, he must turn his face to rid himself of the vision of rejected truth - and yet he finds that even such distraction turns him to an awareness "of the country which seemed to lie beyond the silence, or in it, stretching off into the distance around him" - a situation and environment different from this present material world, an environment to be described as silence empty of this material world, or an an environment beyond such concerns as silence or non-silence. As Tarwater finally catches sight of the Powderhead homestead, Flannery O'Connor's imagery
mounts in a crescendo of explicitness indicating that the reader should beware of an irony: though Tarwater may think he has escaped his vocation, his glimpse of Powderhead reveals otherwise. Tarwater "might have been Moses glimpsing the promised land." Eventually, therefore, Flannery O'Connor has woven the web of symbolism to a peak in preparation for the climax in which Tarwater realizes that he is one of those who must "wander in the world, strangers from that violent country where that silence is never broken except to shout the truth." Tarwater realizes that the material world is not his true country and that Powderhead and the truths it represents is the prophetic place of his peace, that like the great prophets he must merely wander in the material world of the evil "dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping,"58 as one on a mission, a displaced person whom nothing on earth can fill with its petty finiteness.

Thus, again a study of the specific wordings and associations of words in passages throughout the novel shows that Flannery O'Connor has woven an organic texture for which her climax is a logical outcome.

With the symbolism of the foreign country, as with so many of the other strands of symbolism throughout the novel,

Flannery O'Connor has shown herself as a skilled craftsman, artistically weaving a unified novel. This chapter has used the climax and several other intense sections of *The Violent Bear It Away* - together with many random allusions from scattered sections of the novel whenever similar wording was noted to be weaving a pattern in the book - has used this close explication of Miss O'Connor's wording to show that in *The Violent Bear It Away* she has written a unified novel. The examination has also shown that Flannery O'Connor uses for focusing content and theme those devices which (in her statements about her writing) she claimed to be using. She employs the connotativeness of Biblical imagery and allusion to lay the mythical framework of her story. She uses ironic contrasts and paradoxes; she weaves authorial viewpoint into the narration through poetically condensed phrasing and associations of images; she presents many-layered symbolism that displays many things simultaneously - in accordance with her sacramentalism. Moreover, this examination has shown that *The Violent Bear It Away* illustrates the many facets of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy of life as that philosophy has been expressed in her expository writings. From the separation of reason and feeling, through the warped modern society, to the prophetic destiny of an incarnationalist appreciation of the world where violent focused energy expresses fullness of reality - Flannery O'Connor's whole philosophy has been shown here present in her longest and most complex story.
Most of the interpretations expressed here are original with the present author. Thus the present examination has been more than merely an application of the earlier chapters explaining Miss O'Connor's statements of theory. The present analysis has shown working examples of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy of life. Perhaps more significantly ultimately, the present analysis has explicated especially the connotative and symbolic patterns in *The Violent Bear It Away* much more thoroughly and explicitly than has any previous study. One of the most significant results of the present analysis, moreover, is the observation of how necessary the motif of love unifying all creation in the fullness of being is to an adequate explanation of this novel. This is a motif unnoticed by previous critics.

What the present chapter has shown can perhaps best be summarized in Flannery O'Connor's own words vaguely etching the sweep of *The Violent Bear It Away*: "those who, like Tarwater, see, will see what they have no desire to see and the vision will be the purifying fire."\(^{59}\) The present chapter verifies Flannery O'Connor's understated expectations: "It took seven years to write *The Violent Bear It Away* and I hope there's more

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to it than a short story."  

In any event, this chapter has attempted to follow the guidelines which Flannery O'Connor herself had suggested for critics confused about what she was trying to do: "my characters are described as despairing only by superficial critics. Very few of my characters despair and those who do, don't reflect my views. You have to get the writer's view by looking at the novel as a whole."  

60 O'Connor, "Off the Cuff," 72.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The present study has taken note of how critics of Flannery O'Connor are so confused in their interpretation and evaluation of her writings that they divide into several completely opposed camps. This confusion is seen as quite remarkable in an author who is judged to be among the ten most important authors of the age and who made relatively numerous attempts to explain her theories of life and of art. Flannery O'Connor made her many statements about life and art on many different occasions, shaping her words to the particular question or audience or occasion; and she made her attempts with varying degrees of formality and exactness—depending on whether her views were captured in a formal prepared essay or in a personal letter or conversation.

One primary goal of this study, therefore, has been to set forth Flannery O'Connor's views in a systematic way, eliminating confusion that has resulted from the incompleteness of Miss O'Connor's remarks and from the many different kinds of statements she has made.

Miss O'Connor urges the writer, first of all, to see. The writer must have respect for and take delight in concrete objects of matter—whether these surfaces are grimy or pleasant. Then he must look for the unique quality that causes a thing to be what it is. As Flannery O'Connor herself looks at the world, she sees it
as centered in Redemption. Her stories, therefore, often depict a disturbed, angry world needing a redeemer.

Many of Flannery O'Connor's critics claim that her writings suffer from the celebrated "disjunction between sensibility and belief." Some find her to be violating her own first principle of "seeing" the real world; they claim that her theological presuppositions cause her to see a world in which things are either all good or all bad - amidst the grime of irreligion, cruelty, misuse of sex, and suffering, she asserts a Catholic's dogmatic absolutism. Flannery O'Connor replies, however, that her critics are guilty of the very weakness they claim to find in her: a critic contending that a Catholic author must have an a-priori determination about reality is himself possessed of an a-priori falsification. Moreover, though such a charge may have value against some Catholic authors, anyone with his wits will realize that supernatural propagandizing would fail to accomplish its goal: by emphasizing the value of spirit alone it would fail to make its desired contact with those who believe in nature only. Finally, such propagandizing, foreign to her consciousness as a writer, does not falsify or destroy nature; it adds another dimension to it. Thus, Flannery O'Connor rejects the notion that her theology makes her an overly didactic writer.

Typical of the confusion among critics of Flannery O'Connor is the fact that the second important group of critics claims that Miss O'Connor is not didactic enough. This second
group of critics argues that Flannery O'Connor suffers the
disjunction between belief and sensibility because her sensibility
is so bent towards the grotesque that proper belief, an affirmative
philosophy, is lacking in her work. Some of these critics argue
that Miss O'Connor had a subconscious attraction for evil; she was
a natural pessimist. Flannery O'Connor replies that the writer
must follow his "vocation": he must write about whatever he finds
he can write about effectively. She can write the sort of thing
that she does produce - whether it is to be labelled grotesque or
not. She admits that perhaps she is subconsciously pessimistic,
but she states that she deliberately uses the grotesque. It is,
at least, not present subconsciously, but consciously - and not
because of her personality or Southern environment. She continues
her rebuttal by pointing out that those who criticize her grotes-
ques often seem to be seeking a "purely affirmative" literature.
Such a purely affirmative vision is faulty because it ignores
man's natural human limitations, because it merely repeats the
 cliches of "traditional piety" for tradition's sake, and because
it leads to what intuitive good taste recognizes as "pious trash."
The purely affirmative vision is faulty because it is produced by
a disjunction between reason and feeling (the very charge of
which she is accused) that violates the nature of man and of art
- a disjunction that characterizes and is produced by modern
society's secularism, a disjunction that produces the exaggerations
that are, by definition, sentimental poor writing. Finally, the purely affirmative vision is faulty because it will not arouse modern society from its own grotesqueness, because it demands a reflection of society's vigor and forgets that a true reflection must show modern society as lacking that vigor and as possessed of a "diseased" personality, because it forgets that in humans even the good is grotesque since it is "under construction," and because it demands that the artist violate the nature of art. Basically, therefore, Flannery O'Connor accuses her critics of the very "disjunction between belief and sensibility" of which they accuse her.

In order to follow Miss O'Connor's line of reasoning as she refutes the above charge, it is necessary to investigate deeply a few matters of importance as premises of Miss O'Connor's positive philosophy and theory of literature. The refutations uncover the basic premises of Miss O'Connor's thought. Thus Flannery O'Connor is seen to believe in the nature of man as a unified personality. She feels that respect for human nature and the integrity of the human personality demand that the thinker not separate reason from feeling in man - either in the life of man or in the art he produces. Both reason and feeling, with reason governing, are basic to life and art. Finally, Flannery O'Connor holds that the weakness of modern society is that it is both an aggregated result of and an environmental cause of this faulty separation within the personality of the individual.
On this foundation the reader can now erect the positive structure of Flannery O'Connor's thought. Miss O'Connor finds the world and man as essentially fallen, limited, evil. She presents her view theologically, philosophically, morally - she repeats her basic positions from all these different viewpoints. The critic must be careful not to shun her theological terms simply because he may disagree with Miss O'Connor's basic theology; Miss O'Connor expects her insights to be valid on any and all of these several levels, regardless of the terms used to express her ideas. Regardless of whether Miss O'Connor is using theological terms or whether she is using philosophical, psychological, or moral terms - her writings have the basic message that man has limitations. Pride of idolatry denies these limitations and/or seeks to ignore them. Incarnated with these limitations and best seen in the flesh - spirit human person (or in Christ, for those who accept Miss O'Connor's theology) is a surge of "what is," a throb of the fullness of being. Out of man's fall comes his rise. Love insures an even greater fullness of being whereby man rises from his limitations and finds goodness in his limitations and eventually unites with all other men and with the God who is Existence. Man is able so to unite and to attain fullest being because his limitations have shown his emptiness, his need to go outside himself to attain completeness.

A third group of critics does not argue with Flannery O'Connor's meanings as exemplifying the disjunction between belief
and the reality of the world. They argue instead that Miss O'Connor's stories are incomprehensibly confusing, that she has lost control of them as an artist. Flannery O'Connor does not deny that she avoids the traditional methods of revealing the author's side of a conflict - by inserting a "good-guy" mouthpiece character, for example. But she does feel that she is not writing confused muddles. She indicates that the problem with these critics is that they do not know how to find her judgements emerging from the details of her stories. Influenced by the South and by the Bible, she actually has five major fictional techniques. Each of these acts as a judgement-frame revealing the author's point of view: (1) her emphasis on religion and "manners"; (2) symbols, shades of connotation, and biblical myth, which merge and infinitely expand layers of related meaning - especially character-symbols which emerge victorious or defeated - and the four-layered medieval exegetical method of interpretation of text; (3) shifting point of view with resulting authorial comment in patterns of connotation and slant of "exact wording" of narrative; (4) intensity of "one-cylinder syntax" and the emptiness of cliches; and (5) ironical exaggerations and reversals of meaning.

True fiction must be multi-layered or cease being art. True fiction must have its concrete details radiating with expanding meanings simultaneously true, just as a true vision of reality sees matter and especially man as pulsing with ever more complex
unities of spirit harmonizing into the simultaneous unity of all being. "Of those who look for" the ultimate in life, therefore, "none get so close as the artist" because the very nature of art requires a multi-layered object simultaneously pulsing with many spirits or meanings - just as, for Flannery O'Connor, true philosophy requires a many-layered object (this world) simultaneously pulsing with many spirits, until the unity of full-being subsumes all in the "evolutionary process." Art demands the incarnationalist technique just as prophecy (of which art is a branch) and a true philosophy of life demand an incarnationalist vision that can be expressed only in the incarnationalist technique of the "poet" - a poet whose medium is life or at least a poet whose medium is words. The very "way to transcend" (not ignore) the limitedness of this world - the essence of prophetic vision - is to find "a form to express it in" for the novelist. Fiction and life must have their outward signs that are so wedded to inward meaning that these outward signs not only signify but also indeed partake in and cause inward mutations on a scale vast enough to expand into the intense vitality of the ultimate "what is." This is Flannery O'Connor's incarnationalism, her sacramentalism.

Since this abstract discussion of Flannery O'Connor's ideas and techniques needed application, preferably to her most important story, and since previous critics have failed to perform
a detailed explication of Miss O'Connor's multi-layered fiction - this study then carefully examined *The Violent Bear It Away*. A close study and interpretation of the final vision scene of the novel provide a good summary of Flannery O'Connor's thought and show that her thinking in the book reflects the affirmative, realistic (as opposed to pessimistic deterministic) philosophies stated in her expository writings. Present are intimations of the notion of good through evil, the notion of the limitedness of the material world, especially made vivid by death, the deficiency of mere reason or even humanism's merely human actions, the presence of multiple-being in a detail of matter, brotherhood of love, and focused intensity of action. Many of Flannery O'Connor's stated techniques are present in this final vision scene also. Miss O'Connor's use of many-level symbols is especially apparent in her use of the ambiguous fire and of the many kinds of fullness and emptiness, especially the multiple-leveled hunger and bread symbols which represent literal food, the Christian heaven, general fullness, the Eucharist and therefore Christ Himself and His love for others. The Biblical mythological framework is obvious. Irony is revealed especially in the contrast between the obvious literal meaning of the details and the way Flannery O'Connor's delicate nuances of wording shade these details into various levels of symbolic meaning - an especially organic unity for a novel, one of whose main concerns is to contrast the materialistic man with the prophetic sacramental man who can view
many things as having simultaneous being in sensed object or action. Irony and paradox shade such expressions as "silent word" and the unconsummable burning bush - and etch the difference rather sharply between earlier justice-prophecy in Old Tarwater and later mercy-prophecy in young Tarwater. This ending provides a good summary because here Flannery O'Connor fuses into a climax the various patterns of the novel. Especially revealed as significant are the motifs of emptiness, fullness (including hunger, food, light, sound, smell, water, and the three kinds of actions), fire, the displaced person in the foreign country - perceived in and through the physical object which possesses a deeper unity in brotherly possession of the same spirit with other physical objects.

In order to use more extensive references to Flannery O'Connor's exact significant wordings, in order to see more clearly that the correct interpretation had been given to these climactic symbols, and in order to prove that this climactic fusion of symbols is an-organic outgrowth of the texture of the whole book, three of the most significant scenes from throughout the book were then analyzed: the scene just after the visit of the truant officer, the scene at Lucette's sermon, and the scenes as Rayber, Bishop, and Tarwater enact the drama at Cherokee Lodge with the web of references throughout this final third of the book to the "foreign country."
Many motifs that appear in this explication are the notions of the head, circular movement and "straining ahead," weight, fire, odors, food and hunger and the Eucharist and Christmas, emptiness, the steady gaze, fish, proper names, sexual perversion, seeds, the rock, metallic hardness, purgatives and methods of cleansing, symbols of the devil, mobility, asceticism, colors (especially black, red, and violet), the power and value of "word," dust and metal, the foreign country and the displaced person, and hats.

As a result of examining how closely textured the novel is and how carefully each of these motifs takes on multiple layers of meaning until each merges into most of the others, the reader comes to see Flannery O'Connor's sacramentalism of thought and of fictional technique fully exemplified. The reader sees the novel giving concrete evidence of the finiteness of this world, of the disjoined human personality, of the passage through evil to good until man and his world shake off their limitedness in the presence of God-incarnated-in-matter - and eventually the grand transformation whereby the summit of fullest being's good emerges from evil.

One of the most significant results of this analysis, moreover, is the observation of how necessary the motif of love unifying all creation in the fullness of being is to an adequate explanation of the novel. This is a motif unnoticed by previous
critics.

But more important to the present study as a whole - the present examination of *The Violent Bear It Away* has used close explication of Miss O'Connor's wording to show that in this novel she has written a unified book. This examination has also shown that Flannery O'Connor uses for focusing content and theme those devices which (in her statements about her writing) she claimed to be using. She uses the connotativeness of Biblical imagery and allusion to lay the mythical framework of her story. She uses ironic statements and contrasts and paradoxes; she weaves authorial viewpoint into the narration by poetically condensed phrasing and associations of images; she presents many-layered symbolism that presents many things simultaneously - in accordance with her sacramentalism. Moreover, this examination has shown that *The Violent Bear It Away* illustrates the many facets of Flannery O'Connor's philosophy of life as that thinking has been expressed in her expository writings. From the separation of reason and feeling, through the warped modern society, to the prophetic destiny of an incarnationalist appreciation of the world where violent focused energy expresses fullness of reality - Flannery O'Connor's whole philosophy has been shown here present in her longest and most complex story.

Thus, from the necessary animalism of "wise blood" to the evil and limitations of how "a good man is hard to find" to the
thrusting surging multiple-significance of matter bursting with spirit because only "the violent bear it away" to the ultimate unity in total being where "everything that rises must converge" - Flannery O'Connor has left a comprehensible, unified, and eminently literary testament.
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Four examples illustrating the way modern society unjustifiably separates reasoned discipline from emotional convenience occur as parenthetic inserts in some of Flannery O'Connor's analyses. She examines modern education, the plight of the Negro, the cult of the "phony South," and the gaudiness of modern life.

An interviewer recalls Flannery O'Connor's stating "that the student's taste should not be consulted, it should be formed." Miss O'Connor responds that she feels it is self-evident that the student is in school "to be taught what there is to teach, not to be asked what he would like to learn or read." To Miss O'Connor this truth is self-evident because of the very nature of a school; its commonly agreed-on function is to help people learn. She herself "went to a 'progressive' high school" where she could read what she wanted. "Consequently, I read practically nothing.

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2Ibid.
Reading was tolerated at that school. I don't recollect that it was encouraged. . . . The subjects were integrated with each other and everything was a blur. About all I remember of those four years is the way the halls smelled and bringing my accordion sometimes to play for the 'devotional.' I'm sure the schools are better now." Miss O'Connor criticizes the anti-intellectualism of her school, where "reading was tolerated," where subjects were not truths to be learned but a "blur," and where the only thing she remembers is not facts or skills but a few sensations such as "the way the halls smelled" and a few emotional pleasures such as accordion playing. It is wrong that in this school reason is dethroned - wrong not only because of the desirability of yoking reason and feeling in the full personality but also because of the nature of a school as a place where learning should occur. At Flannery O'Connor's high school, students were not formed; their whims were consulted. School observed merely what was pleasing. One is reminded of Miss O'Connor's strictures that reasoned discipline is necessary for a writer to overcome his emotional craving for the easy, his emotional craving to abandon the routine of sitting at a desk and hammering away at his writing. At Flannery O'Connor's high school emotion was supreme in that sensations

3Ibid.
were what she remembered and not things pertaining to reason. One should note even the sentimentalism of the word "devotional" - which over-emotional connotation is strengthened and assured by the glaring quotation marks.

So faithfully does this example illustrate Miss O'Connor's theory about the way modern society separates reason and feeling that even the complicated paradox is present. All this excessive catering to emotion in school was dressed up as if it were an excess of rationalism - dressed up with the "scientific" label, "progressive" - again set off in quotation marks to emphasize the way this improper stress on science both stems from and leads to excessive rationalism rather than true science, and to emphasize that this is a typically modern ill.

This type of schooling does more than illustrate the ill of contemporary society; it also helps perpetuate the ill. The person who is misled into writing "purely affirmative" literature that improperly separates reason and feeling may have been misled by the "general atmosphere" of culture, or this false vision may have "been foisted on him by a sorry education." In Flannery O'Connor's view "today's universities don't stifle enough writers" - a clever statement to be interpreted several ways: today's universities, for one thing, do not give enough discipline.

\[O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 73^4.\]
\[O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" 382.\]
The "sorry education" of today, therefore, illustrates, causes, and results from the sorry modern education.

The situation of the Negro affords another illustration of the weakness in modern culture. As we have seen previously, "sentimentality is the skipping of the . . . process" of correcting an ill by (among other things) "our slow participation" in the work of improvement and "an early arrival at a mock state of perfection or improvement." Often too it is the denial that imperfection exists, a false emphasis on "purely affirmative," an exaggeration. This sentimentality appears in much of modern writing's portrayal of the Negro, who "is not the clown he's made out to be," not the unreasoning, "uneducated," easy-going fool some writing makes him seem. The portrayal of race relations in the South and a solution to problems of race relations "may not be the ideal," but Southerners, leaders and writers, are not rushed into a course of demanding the purely affirmative, the sentimental; they have "enough sense not to ask for the ideal but only to ask for the possible, the workable." When

6 O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," 73; "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 11. Earlier reference was made to this material on p. 90.

an interviewer asked Flannery O'Connor if "the philosophy of gradualism in relation to integration is the best" solution to the problem, she replied that "what's best is what's possible." Any leaps for the purely affirmative, for total perfection immediately, are sentimental. She added that even the phrasing of the interviewer's question revealed modern culture's sentimental excess rationalism: "the word gradualism is just an abstraction which hides the concrete problem. If you mean by it that you integrate the libraries before you close the swimming pools, yes, that's best." Solutions urged on the South by the rest of the country are, moreover, often an example of the sentimental split between reason and feeling: "you don't form a committee to do this or pass a resolution; both races have to work it out the hard way." Humans must have their "slow participation" in the process of improvement through "social discipline," not through idealistic solutions that seek an immediate leap to perfection. A northern writer tells what he feels; a southern writer thinks about the social implications of the situation. He writes about these. While

the Northerner is skimming around with emotions alone, the Southerner uses reason - he "thinks" - to analyze what reality he has to show, even though reality may demand slow, painful human efforts. Solutions will come only "in the long run." The solution to the problem of race relations in the South will not come with laws that seek to sweep immediately to a goal, but will come only through hard work. New laws and instant solutions only cause Southern people who are already used to "milling around together in the South" - cause them to be "milling around together in a few more places. No basic attitudes are being changed. Industrialization is what changes the culture of the South, not integration."\textsuperscript{11}

If pictures of the Negro and of race relations are sentimentally falsified in much modern writing, so also is the picture of the South in much writing. Again Flannery O'Connor gives an example of a society improperly split between reason and feeling. "Southern identity is not really connected with mocking birds and beaten biscuits and white columns . . . it is not accessible to the poll-taker; it is not something that can become a cliche."\textsuperscript{12} "Most readers rely on various

\textsuperscript{11}O'Connor, "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," 31.

\textsuperscript{12}O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 35.
critical cliches to explain Southern literature \(^{13}\) that don't explain anything. \(^{13}\) These cliches are the easy way to arrive at answers without having to use reason. As we have seen, modern society, with its sentimental and pseudo-scientific reliance on "poll-takers" - on the "relative as absolute," on making up one's opinions "in the light of statistics," \(^{14}\) on pretending to use a reasoned science but really using the easy or convenient - modern society pretends to value reason and fact and organized knowledge alone (not a good thing), and actually ends up valuing excessive emotion. Southern identity is not to be found in these materialistic evidences, as the modern secular culture of opinion-surveys would expect; "it is not made from what passes, but from those qualities that endure, regardless of what passes, because they are related to truth," to reason. "It lies very deep." \(^{15}\) Southern identity is related to truth, to reason, as well as those qualities that pass; it lies deep, not with emotions that waver with passing delights. The South of

\(^{13}\)O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," 33.


\(^{15}\)O'Connor, "The Regional Writer," 35.
"the writer from Hollywood or New York," the writer from the garish materialism of movie-Hollywood and advertising-New York. It is a sentimental, "phony-South."\textsuperscript{16}

The garish showiness of modern society affords the final illustration of the way modern culture splits reason from feeling. It is in reference to this overly-idealistic, overly-emotional, sentimentalized world that Flannery O'Connor can, in the previous example, refer to the "phony-South" as the production of "the writer from Hollywood or New York" not of the "Georgia writer."\textsuperscript{17}

The writer from New York is the writer earlier shown to be replaceable by an advertising agency, the writer with the urge merely to reflect the opulence of modern society's materialism, the writer who cannot see the irony in Flannery O'Connor's question: "How, with all this prosperity and strength and classlessness staring you in the face, can you honestly produce a literature which doesn't take plain the joy of life?"\textsuperscript{18} Such misguided advertising gets written because the writer thinks he must give the public what it wants, "social realism" outmoded decades ago, not what interests the novelist.\textsuperscript{19} Earlier analysis has already

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{18}O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 160.
\textsuperscript{19}O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic Novelist," 11-12.
shown such a writer to be the sentimentalist spawned by modern society. The writer from Hollywood also caters to the secular belief. He too produces, in movies and television, the gaudy, garish, "prosperity and strength" of those who have put their trust in the world of matter and therefore judge by what is most showy, by quantity rather than by what "lies deep." Naturally then, this writer from Hollywood cannot be satisfied but by the "purely affirmative"; he must take the sentimentalist's leap to sudden perfection. This sentimentalism is precisely what Flannery O'Connor finds unacceptable in a television adaptation of her story, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." In this story "an itinerant no-good agrees to marry a widow's idiot daughter to gain title to her car. He does, but after driving a hundred miles or so, abandons the girl in a roadside diner." In the television version "they changed the ending just a bit by having Shiftlet suddenly get a conscience and come back for the girl."20 Because he is a product of modern society, because he believes (and indeed succeeds) in merely reflecting modern society, because he demands a skipping of the process of improvement and "the early arrival at a mock state of innocence," the writer from Hollywood has Mr. Shiftlet "suddenly get a conscience." He has Mr. Shiftlet arrive at mock innocence too quickly and with too little effort. He must have Hollywood's happy ending. Miss O'Connor discussed with

another interviewer how a "pointed, ironical tale of avarice, betrayal, and the birth of moral insight" became " a piece of sentimental, easy-to-take escapism." She added humorously a story of how a Southern neighbor had ratified the Hollywood ending's lack of true artistry in the name of all society by telling Miss O'Connor the next morning: "Why, Mary Flannery, I do declare, I never dreamed you could do such nice work" - with emphasis on the word "nice."21 Moreover, the writer from Hollywood will cater to the secularism, the gaudy materialism, which we have seen Flannery O'Connor connect with the sentimentalism of modern society. In the television version of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "Gene Kelly played Mr. Shiftlet and for the idiot daughter they got some young actress who had just been voted one of the ten most beautiful women in the world."22 The showy and good looking world of matter, the stars' world of advertised rather than earned quality, is the domain of the writer from Hollywood. Flannery O'Connor's stress on the incongruity of having an idiot portrayed by "one of the ten most beautiful women in the world" presumably is an ironic slap at the way Hollywood and its devotees of modern

society insist on soothing their emotions and denying man's limitations by making a thing look "pretty" rather than by showing its real grotesqueness. Flannery O'Connor's stress on this incongruity also reminds one of the way the sentimentalist insistence on the pretty tends "by natural law to become its opposite," how the stress on the sentimentally pretty naturally tends to disconnect "sex from its meaning in life and makes it simply an experience for its own sake." For such people a supposed devotion to religion soon converts to its natural opposite: for such people the situation is similar to what Mrs. McIntyre faced when she felt "Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother." The almost redundant way in which Miss O'Connor cannot mention Hollywood without calling it "Hollywood, California," puts unnatural emphasis on the word "California." This stress is probably an attempt to suggest the garish materialism of over-publicized California as the new promised land of materialism. Certainly California had such a significance in her mind when she wrote the following letter to Robert Fitzgerald: "I would like to go to California for about two minutes to further these researches, though at times I feel that

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a feeling for the vulgar is my natural talent and don't need any particular encouragement. Did you see the picture of Roy Rogers' horse attending a church service in Pasadena?" Just as certainly it is the garish materialism of modern society that she finds offensive when she ironically writes to Richard Stern: "Last week I made $50 reading a story at a nearby college and I am going to buy a vacuum cleaner with it and reform my life." The suggestion that California is a prime symbol of the modern materialistic culture may not even be too much buried in Flannery O'Connor's subconscious in light of her emphasis on the sentimental "old lady" who demanded mock innocence without its price in reasoned discipline. The old lady, it is also emphasized, lives in California, the ideal land of the gaudy, garish, sentimental, materialistic modern world. Flannery O'Connor makes a final jab at the way modern society's showy materialism produces the sentimental when she mocks the poor taste and overly emotional patriotism of a display she saw on a trip: "the first thing they showed me in Dallas was General Walker's house - a battleship grey, two story, clappboard dwelling with a giant picture window

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26 Ibid.


in front in which you could see a ceramic Uncle Sam with a lamp shade on top of it. Texas and the U. S. flags flying on the lawn." Miss O'Connor's view of such gaudy over-emotional materialism is therefore one more example of her view that she has properly analyzed modern society - in its denial of limitation and therefore its insistence on the value of matter alone, in its consequent emotionalism and lack of proper harmony between reason and feeling.

The situation of modern education, the problem of the American Negro, the "phony South," and the gaudy showiness of modern society (especially as seen in Hollywood and television, and in the advertisers' need for public display of matter), therefore, are important illustrations for Flannery O'Connor of the weakness in modern society.

29 Letter to Richard Stern, 10.
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Donald Racky, Jr. has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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  Date                        Signature of Adviser